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STUDIES IN POETRY

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Stopford A. Brooke

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BY

STOPFORD A[illegible]

LONDON
DUCKWORTH AND COMPANY
3 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.
1908

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CONTENTS

WILLIAM BLAKE

WILLIAM BLAKE was born November 28, 1757, in Broad Street, Carnaby Market, London. His father was a respectable hosier, and would have brought up the boy to his own business. But Art had laid on him her overmastering hand, and he was her faithful servant all his life long. His art, as painter and engraver, would be a worthy subject, but it is not mine. What his lyrical poetry was as literature, and its relation to the general movement of poetry in England, is the subject of this essay.

He became a mystic, a poet, a designer in colour and in black and white, and he considered himself to be something of a prophet. He was a prophet as a poet is a prophet. He touched matters which lay on the outskirts of the realm of pure poetry—political, social, and religious—but he touched them with a poet's passion. He belongs to those poets who, before the outbreak of the Revolution in France in 1789, set forward in verse some of the revolutionary ideas. Neither class, caste, nor privilege existed for Blake. Kings and the aristocrats who supported the class of kings represented by Louis XIV., Blake denounced as villains. He had an equal abhorrence

for the priests, who used their power and their craft to hamper the natural life and the souls of men, and for the kind of religion they taught. His passion for human liberty was intense, even to extremes. His instinct of the oneness of mankind in the Eternal's eyes was equally intense. Gray had not long been dead when this phenomenon arose; yet I do not suppose a wider gulf on these matters could be than that which separated Blake from Gray. One would say a century divided the *Songs of Innocence* from the *Elegy*, even though a faint breath of the revolution-views of man sighs through the *Elegy*. Blake then represents, in part of his work, the new spirit of the Revolution which was coming on the earth, and of course into poetry. At this point he stands alongside of Cowper and Burns, but much more resolutely, much more consciously, much more sternly than they, is he of the Revolution.

In other ways, more immediately connected with the history of poetry in England, he was also a forerunner; striking into the light and air high up on the mount Parnassus new fountains of song which were in the future to become rivers of fresh emotion, thought, and imagination. It is always fascinating to stand at the birthplace of a great stream and think of the splendour, use, and comfort it has been to the children of men; and the streams of fresh song which Blake smote from the rock have, like one of the noble rivers, brought joy, festivity, awakening, and novelty to the imagination and the soul of man.

His earliest work preceded the work of Cowper and Burns. The *Poetical Sketches* were written and finished by 1777. But they were not published till 1783. His *Songs of Innocence* were set forth in 1789, his *Songs of Experience* in 1794. Even the last, then, preceded the first volume of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* by four years. The new elements he brought into poetry were taken up by Wordsworth and thrown for the first time into clear definition and challengeable form in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth did not take them from Blake. They arose spontaneously in his soul. They were in the air. Nor did Wordsworth represent all the new aspects of thought and emotion Blake created in the world of song. The political, religious, and mystic elements of Blake's poetry were felt by other poets than Wordsworth, and put into clearer form than Blake gave to them. But Blake sketched them all, he began the picture which others finished. He is like one born out of due time.

At the age of twelve he began to write verse, and he continued to amuse his leisure with it till he was twenty years old. He threw these poems together in 1777, and at Flaxman's instance published them in 1783 in a volume entitled *Poetical Sketches*. It is a little collection, and it was lost on its production. But small as it is, it is full of curious interest—a landmark so distinct that it arrests the historian of poetry. It was partly original, as I have already said, and on its original elements I shall afterwards dwell. On the other

hand, it is partly imitative, for no poet can altogether escape from the past; but its imitation was not of the poetry that preceded it, but of that of the Elizabethans. In that imitation it was some what at one with Blake's immediate predecessors. Gray, Collins, Warton, and the rest of them had initiated a reversion towards the Elizabethan poets, a vivid interest in Shakespeare, and a direct imitation of Spenser. These new interests had been growing for some time, and Blake shared in them. They accorded with his nature, which itself belonged to the childhood of the world. The work of Gray in these matters was transition work. It did not strike deep into the future; and it is marked by the trained skill, the determined artifice, and the careful composition of the Augustan poets. Blake, on the other hand, did no transition work of this kind at all. He went straight back in this book, and at a single leap, for his models, to the Elizabethans. He ignored the whole of the critical and artificial school. His language is the language of a wild and uncultivated country; his verse is rough, unobedient to metrical laws. What excellence there is, is attained by dint of Nature, not of Art. It is a boy who is writing, with a boy's ignorance and carelessness of rules of art, with also a boy's daring originality. He adds to his imitative work constituents which did not belong to the Elizabethans. Its air is different from that which Spenser and Shakespeare breathed. It draws into it some of the elements of the future. It belongs, even in its

imitations of the Elizabethans, to the nineteenth century, not to the eighteenth. This is its special interest in the history of poetry.

One of the poems in the *Sketches* is an imitation of Spenser. Others of his time had also done this, but Blake did it with an individuality which not only modernised the Elizabethan way of thinking and feeling, but also changed in every stanza the Spenserian metre. Two are ballads, and ballads were a fashion of the day, set on foot by the publication of the Percy Ballads. But those that were written now were sentimental, graceful compositions, like Goldsmith's *Edwin and Angelina*. Blake's ballads clash out rude, untamed, and bloodstained verses; their note is that of the most supernatural and savage of the Border Ballads. Gray would have read them with dismay, and turned from them with contempt. Indeed, they are not good, but still they were quite different from what had gone before them; and the something different in them went on, to become, in other hands, a new power in song.

A freshly awakened interest in the Elizabethan drama belongs also to this time when Blake was young. But it was chiefly a critical interest. No one cared to write in the manner of these dramatists; no one could. But Blake did. He took up the lyre which had fallen from Marlowe's hands in the dramatic fragment of *Edward III.*, but the sound of it was broken and inharmonious in comparison with the sonorous music of Marlowe. Shake-

speare was almost too quiet for Blake's redundant youth. Then also, he took up the shepherd pipe to which the greater Elizabethans sang their songs. A song like *My silks and fine array* might have been fathered by Fletcher.

What charmed him in these ancients was their naturalism. What displeased him in his contemporaries was their artificialism. Collins, though he strove for simplicity and loved it, though he arrived at some natural joy, could not altogether shake off the atmosphere of his time. In Gray there was too much self-contemplation, too much self-conscious art, too much traditional convention, to allow natural impulse, natural passion, to have its full freedom. Blake never breathed that artificial atmosphere. He lived when it brooded, still heavily, on poetry, but he lived above its close and breezeless elements. He was conscious of them, but would have nothing to do with them. 'Let others,' he said, 'sit in council with their modern peers,

> And judge of tinkling rhymes and elegances terse,

I will not.' And he might well say that, for the transition poetry which followed on Gray and Collins had now sunk into the miserable twangling of Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper*. Now and again a little musical cry like a child's laugh arose in some neglected ballad, but, on the whole, the Muses had fallen asleep in England. And Blake could find them nowhere. His poem, in 1777, entitled *To the Muses*, expresses, not only his dismay at the decay of

poetry in England, but cries out for the restoration to poetry of the childlike passion which, among the ancient poets of England, sprang to lovely life, fresh as a fountain from the hills.

Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the Sun, that now
From antient melody have ceas'd:

Whether in Heav'n ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the Earth,
Or the blue regions of the air
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,
Beneath the bosom of the sea,
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry!

How have you left the antient love
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move!
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!

There is no languor, no forced or conventional phrasing in the verses of this early book. And the notes he strikes are manifold and various. Notes of loveliness, simplicity, and passion, even of fine melody, for, though the metre of these poems is in the strangest confusion, it has a sweetness of its own, a musical wash as of the wind through woods of pine; and before long, as his original nature forced him, he made his own manner of verse and his own metres. The manner and music of the fragment of *Edward III.* had not been

heard in England since the Restoration. Its verse is sensational, but it does not think of itself. The imagination is at work in it like a savage of genius; but, at last, it is truly at work. No one, since Milton laid down his harp, would have written these lines on England as the sovereign of the seas:

> Our right, that Heaven gave
> To England, when at the birth of nature
> She was seated in the deep; the Ocean ceas'd
> Her mighty roar, and, fawning play'd around
> Her snowy feet, and own'd his awful Queen.

Still nobler, almost like Milton, and inconceivably different from anything else written at the time, is this little speech of Chandos:

> Considerate age, my Lord, views motives,
> And not acts; when neither warbling voice
> Nor trilling pipe is heard, nor pleasure sits
> With trembling age, the voice of Conscience then,
> Sweeter than music in a summer's eve,
> Shall warble round the snowy head, and keep
> Sweet symphony to feather'd angels, sitting
> As guardians round your chair; then shall the pulse
> Beat slow, and taste and touch and sound and smell,
> That sing and dance round Reason's fine-wrought throne,
> Shall flee away, and leave them all forlorn;
> Yet not forlorn if Conscience is his friend.

This imagination, in contact here with human life, is even more fresh and vivid in its work on Nature. The four poems addressed to *The Seasons* retain that impersonation in which Spenser delighted, but they are nearer to such impersonation as Keats used in his *Ode to Autumn* than they are to Spenser.

They have the modern rather than the ancient literary touch. Moreover, they hold in them what Spenser's do not hold—the personal love of Nature which is the special mark of the poetry of the nineteenth century. In Blake that love of Nature for her own sake takes the form of joy; an audacious joy as of a young man in the plenitude of his power in the secret strength and godlike splendour of Nature. Here is part of *Summer*:

> O thou who passest thro' our vallies in
> Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat
> That flames from their large nostrils! Thou, O Summer,
> Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft
> Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld
> With joy thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

And here, as a contrast, as soft, as full of humanity as that I have quoted is strong and full of early godhead, are the *Lines to the Evening Star*: their metre halts, but it is a boy who is writing.

> Thou fair-haired angel of the evening,
> Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
> Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
> Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
> Smile on our loves; and, while thou drawest the
> Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
> On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
> In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
> The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
> And wash the dusk with silver.

The little poem *To Morning*, if Shelley could have repaired the metre into his own melody, would be like one of those lyrics of his which embody the

nature-myths of the early world. The poem goes back to such lines as these of Shakespeare :

> Look where the dawn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill;

and it looks forward to Shelley. It is not too long to quote.

> O holy virgin! clad in purest white,
> Unlock heavn's golden gates, and issue forth;
> Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven; let light
> Rise from the chambers of the east, and bring
> The honied dew that cometh on waking day.
> O radiant morning, salute the sun
> Rouz'd like a huntsman to the chace, and with
> Thy buskin'd feet appear upon our hills.

These, spite of their metrical mistakes, are even more modern than Wordsworth, as modern as Keats and Tennyson ; they are prophetic of a time at hand when Nature should impress herself on the poets as a woman on her lover, and bring to life a new, impassioned music. 'The sounding cataract,' said Wordsworth, 'haunted me like a passion.'

Later on, in the prophetic books, he is sometimes, when his mysticism does not intrude, closer to reality. His eye, for the moment, is fixed on the subject. He draws direct from Nature. Nothing then seems to intrude into her sphere. All the world is alive. The lark sings the song of the morning to God. The sun listens, full of awe and humility. The whole world rejoices in itself and in its Maker. Here are lines which it is almost

incredible were written in the eighteenth century. They are even nearer than anything in Wordsworth or Shelley to the spiritual Being of Nature—to that universal Thought and Love of which visible Nature is the form :

Thou hearest the nightingale begin the song of spring;
The lark, sitting upon his earthy bed, just as the morn
Appears, listens silent; then, springing from the waving corn-field, loud
He leads the choir of day: trill—trill—trill—trill—
Mounting upon the wings of light into the great expanse.
Re-echoing against the lovely blue and shining heavenly shell
His little throat labours with inspiration: every feather
On throat and breast and wing vibrate with the effluence divine.
All Nature listens to him silent: and the awful sun
Stands still upon the mountains, looking on this little bird
With eyes of soft humility, and wonder, love, and awe.
Then loud, from their green coverts, all the birds began their song,—
The thrush, the linnet and the goldfinch, robin and the wren,
Awake the sun from his sweet reverie upon the mountains;
The nightingale again essays his song, and through the day
And through the night warbles luxuriant; every bird of song
Attending his loud harmony with admiration and with love.

That is beautiful, and it is only one example of nature poetry in the prophetic books. It touches Milton with one hand, it touches Wordsworth and Shelley with another.

Again, the cry of natural, uncovenanted passion of love in poetry, of which there are scarcely a dozen instances to be found for nearly a hundred years, but which, a few years later, was recovered by Burns in all its fulness, is now struck in 1777

by Blake. And struck in a new manner, a manner all his own; touched not only with natural sensuousness, but with a fire of divine purity, as of one who had seen in her he loved a vision of the heavenly host. The difference of this little poem from the love poetry of his time is incalculable.

> Like as an angel glitt'ring in the sky
> In times of innocence and holy joy;
> The joyful shepherd stops his grateful song
> To hear the music of an angel's tongue.
>
> So when she speaks, the voice of Heaven I hear;
> So when we walk, nothing impure comes near;
> Each field seems Eden, and each calm retreat;
> Each village seems the haunt of holy feet.
>
> But that sweet village where my black-ey'd maid
> Closes her eyes in sleep beneath night's shade,
> Whene'er I enter, more than mortal fire
> Burns in my soul, and doth my song inspire.

But the greatest change in poetry, and difference from the poets of his time, is in the songs. These are truly the first sounding of the modern lyric, of its natural delight and sorrow. They look forward then, but they also look backward. A few of them, in this book, reproduce, in grace and music and natural feeling, the spirit of Elizabethan song. In the *Songs of Innocence* they cease to be imitative; they leave the Elizabethan songsters behind, and are now all Blake's own, original in manner, music, metre, and spirit.

To write a lovely song is one of the rare things of the world. Sometimes a man, when life is thrill-

ing with youthfulness, and when in an hour of uncommon and clear feeling all is lost but the high emotion of the moment, will write a single song, and write no more. There are instances of this in poetry, but they are very uncommon. But to have the power to write many songs, or even half a dozen of a beautiful quality, belongs only to Nature's darlings.

A perfect song needs genius, passion, and the power of giving a lovely movement to the verse—things that are the gift of nature—and with these, the power of seeing what is lovely in the joyfulness or the sorrow either of nature or humanity. It needs the fearlessness which belongs to unself-consciousness. It needs the naturalness of a child. When these are in a man, then any momentary, piercing, passionate impression received from human life and nature—such an impression as naturally fits itself into brevity of expression—is seized on with eagerness, and around every impression all the powers of the soul fly together, adding each its own light, and heat, and variety, till the imagination, rejoicing in the result and glowing with it, first strikes it into a passionate unity and then shapes it into words that sing by their own nature and are enchanted with their own singing. But this impression, fitted to be shaped into a song rather than into any other kind of poetry, does not come forth slowly as an epic or a drama, but rises instantly, like the rising of a water-lily to the surface of a pool. As to its music, it has one

cry above all its various sounds, the cry of the dominant unmeditated emotion which gives it unity. Then what we feel, and what the song ought to make us feel, is that we are in the presence of a birth of Nature herself, as lovely, swift, happy, and unconscious as the sudden unfolding of the water-lily's flower.

Again, the best songs are written not only when the poet is young, but when the nation round him is also young, when humanity wears the beauty and joy of promise. When Shakespeare began his work England had been born again. The people were as bold, natural, and excited as a boy let loose from school. Life was, as it were, a succession of songs. It had the suddenness, the spontaneousness, the want of self-consciousness, the freshness, of a song.

Well, Blake, rising himself, as it were, out of the deep, having no communion with the critical or reflective poetry, abandoning himself frankly to every natural feeling, having genius and its powers, quite devoid of self-consideration, seeing beauty everywhere, hearing music everywhere, ineffably eager and joyous, a very child yet with a man's power—made songs in his heart all day long, and when any one of them leaped in his heart for joy, it rose instantly, like the lily released from the lake-bed, into the flower of unchartered verse.

Moreover, though his world was old around him, a new world was at hand. That was coming, after a pregnancy of centuries, that impulsive outburst

into form of ideas filled each to the brim and overflowing with emotion, which for a short time made the world like the world of Shakespeare's youth,

> Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled
> To music suddenly.

Blake felt that impulse of the Revolution even before it came, as Wordsworth and Coleridge felt it when it came. It is interesting to think that the date of the publication of the *Songs of Innocence* was 1789.

It was no wonder then that he wrote songs. Moreover, there were elements in his character which were the air and fire and dew of songs. He lived in a visionary world of his own in which all things rejoiced and sang. 'Heaven opens here,' he says of Felpham where he lived in a cottage, 'on all sides her golden gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of the celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard and their forms more distinctly seen; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses.' He saw once small and lovely spirits singing in every blossom of the neighbouring cherry tree. This world, gloomy with money-making, did not trouble him. All about him the heavens were filled with the morning stars, chanting the praise of God. Therefore, though the age in which he lived was outworn, his world was even more dewy and young than England was to Shakespeare. No marvel, then, that he was a natural lyrist, that

he could write lines like these, in which the emotion and the metrical movement alike are like the eyes and the dancing of a musical child.

> There she sits and feeds her young,
> Sweet I hear her mournful song;
> And thy lovely leaves among
> There is Love, I hear his tongue.

Nor is it any marvel that he could write, with the same power as he touched the sunlight of life, a song like *My silks and fine array*, in which he pencilled in the deep shadow of life with the quaintness and tenderness of a child. It is imitative; its phrases seem borrowed from Shakespeare; and were one to find it in a play of Fletcher's we should not be surprised; but it has its own music—Blake's silver note, not as yet fully conscious of itself, nor as yet shaped into its individual melody. It differs from Fletcher's singing as one star differs from another.

> My silks and fine array,
> My smiles and languish'd air,
> By love are driv'n away;
> And mournful lean Despair
> Brings me yew to deck my grave:
> Such end true lovers have.
>
> His face is fair as heav'n
> When springing buds unfold;
> O why to him was 't giv'n
> Whose heart is wintry cold?
> His breast is love's all-worship'd tomb,
> Where all love's pilgrims come.

Bring me an axe and spade,
Bring me a winding sheet;
When I my grave have made
Let winds and tempests beat:
Then down I 'll lie as cold as clay.
True love doth pass away!

It is more childlike than Fletcher. It imitates Elizabethan verse as a child imitates its parent. Indeed, the best explanation of Blake's songs is that he was always a child at heart; and it would not have mattered where he lived, he would always have been at home. The child, if he be loved, knows neither time nor space. Were he placed suddenly in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, or on the steps of the Parthenon when Phidias was working, he would play, were those he loved with him, with as much unconsciousness and joy as in his own garden in Surrey. All his life long Blake was like that. Wherever he wished to be he was. Wherever he wished to live he lived. All lovely things were as real to him as fairyland is to the child. All things were of the same time and the same place to him whenever he chose. Not one thought of distrust and fear and shame ever drew him back from spontaneous joy. This was and is, and will be always, the atmosphere in which a certain rare type of the Song is born—the Song unconscious of self or sorrow, full of innocent delight in an innocent world, of happy trust in love.

There are songs of many passions, of sorrow, of

earthly rapture, of mirth, of the fine spirit of youth and age, of natural love, of patriot fervour, of the beauty of the world in our soul—of a hundred things—but the song of the child's heart has never been written by a child. It is only sung within. To write it needed a man with the heart of a child; and to find him is one of the rarest things in the world. We have been driven out of Eden, where we could lie down with the lion and the bear, and hear the angels speak. The swords wave always over the gate and forbid return; and though we remember the music of the song our childhood sang in our soul, we cannot put it into words. But Blake was never unable to return. Whenever he liked he played in Eden, and its songs came freshly to his lips. This leaves him at this point alone among the poets. There are a few who, like Shakespeare, can go forth with Adam and Eve over the world, share in the deep passions of our mortal struggle, then verse them with immortal pity, and afterwards pass back for a moment through the gate, and sing a song of the fearless paradise. Only a very few have done it, and the power to do it was momentary. But Blake lived at choice, and at his ease, within the flashing circle of the swords. No angel sentinel ever challenged him. His *Songs of Innocence* uncover the hidings of this strength of his. 'Yes,' we say as we read them, 'the kingdom of this rare sweet song is like the kingdom of heaven; one must enter it like a little child.'

The *Songs of Innocence* are the poems by which Blake is chiefly known, and they were published in 1789, when the roar of the French Revolution began to throb in the ears of men, so strange are the contrasts of this world. The book sang of the simplest things, of pastoral and city life, of the shepherd and the lambs, of the charity boys and the chimney-sweep, of the common earth, of mother's love and of the love of God. In this choice of homely subject, in this naturalness of emotion and expression, in this theme of the human heart, these songs are the prelude to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The critics of the time, when they read *We are Seven* or of the charity children going to St. Paul's, said that Wordsworth was a fool and that Blake was mad. 'Misshapen wretch,' they cried, as their blear eyes bent over the baby of the new poetry in his cradle, 'the child is babbling like an idiot.' But the child grew and sang so sweetly that all the world, pleased to be in the dewy woods of life again, listened and rejoiced. Blake in the *Songs of Innocence* brought the child to life. It is part of their historical place in English poetry.

Another part of their historical place is—that they are the first clear full example of that idea of the Revolution which is expressed in the term 'the return to Nature.' It is not by any means the first time that the idea was expressed in English poetry. It had been appearing in all the poets who succeeded Pope, but it appeared mingled up with the ideas of the past poetry. In Blake for the first

time it appeared unmingled with the past, and prophesying the future poetry.

As to the songs themselves, they are as gay, as sweet, as musical, and as tender as the song of a mother-bird over her nestlings when the sunny wind is playing in the tree; such songs as a child who had the wisdom of an angel might sing as it wandered in the flowery glades of Eden. They are all of transient emotion, felt, realised, and left behind. But the transiency does not mean want of depth of feeling. The rapidity of change arises, not from carelessness of the present impression, but from the extreme vividness with which the impression that replaces it is felt. This, which is almost unknown in adult life, is of the very nature of a child; and Blake himself realised the equally passionate and transient character of his impressions; and that they were in this of the temper of a child.

Then the whole atmosphere of the little book is that of guileless joy. When the babe is born, he cries:

> Pretty joy!
> Sweet joy but two days old.
> Sweet joy I call thee.
> Thou dost smile,
> I sing the while;
> Sweet joy befall thee!
>
> 'I have no name—
> I am but two days old.'
> What shall I call thee?
> 'I happy am,
> Joy is my name.'
> Sweet joy befall thee!

When the boy looks at Nature he hears everything laugh with joy:

> When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy,
> And the dimpling stream runs laughing by;
> When the air does laugh with our merry wit,
> And the green hill laughs with the noise of it.

And the life lived in them is also that which forms so large an element in a child's heart—a life of the gayest, wildest, quaintest, most unreasoning fantasy, of images of fairy creatures, of animals living and talking to mankind, of birds and insects and all living things at play among themselves and with us, of flowers and trees and clouds, alive and in delight; of dreams that are realities and realities that are dreams. Joy and imagination are the king and queen of the world, and their child is love—love of the old folk sitting under the tree and watching the children at play on the village green, of the lamb wandering by the stream, of the robin under the blossom, of the merry sparrow swift as an arrow, of the bells dancing in the sky, of the song of the nurse while the hills echo to the shouts of the children, of the talk of the glow-worm and the emmet, of the little boy lost, of the pity of man for the world, of all things gracious, gentle, innocent, and tender. These are the daily wonders of the wonderful world that happy artist knew and sang and painted, and they are the wonders of a child.

The religion of the songs is as simple as their joy. There is no prayer in it, nothing but praise, praise for the loveliness of the world where he saw

angels walking in the fields and in every flower a fairy of God. God was the Father of all, and took care of them, and was delighted to take care of them. When we read a little poem like *The Lamb* we understand how this wise poet felt about the world. It was a world of everyday love and beauty in common life, but it was also that quaint enchanted world which children create for God and the angels, and of which they talk so seriously. Take, for example, verses like these:

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower,
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles in the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
Where flocks have took delight.
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright;
Unseen, they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest,
Where birds are cover'd warm;
They visit caves of every beast,
To keep them from all harm.
If they see any weeping
That should have been sleeping,
They pour sleep on their head,
And sit down by their bed.

What a world! And when into the midst of it steps the lion, with ruddy eyes and tears of gold, and watches the whole world's fold for God, and lies down with the lamb to sleep—then the creative imagination of a man has entered into the child's heart, and we possess that mingling of both which is distinct in English song;—the only soil in which lyrics like these come to a perfect flowerage.

The *Songs of Experience* succeeded, five years later, the *Songs of Innocence*. The title tells us what they mean. They are the reversal of the *Songs of Innocence*, the result of knowing good *and* evil. Even the titles of the greater number are the same as those of the *Songs of Innocence*, as if Blake wished us to know the double face which the world presented to him. I have quoted *Infant Joy*. Here is *Infant Sorrow*, as Blake engraved it for the *Songs of Experience*, and when we remember its predecessor we know what he was trying to do in the *Songs of Experience*.

My mother groan'd, my father wept,
Into the dangerous world I leapt;
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swadling-bands,
Bound and weary, I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

Most of the others are set over in the same way, in fierce realisation of misery and pain, against the innocent life he had celebrated; and the horror is as unmixed, as ungradated, as the pleasure and beauty

were. Among all the *Songs of Experience* there are only a few, like *The Little Girl Lost* and *Found*,[1] which are not dark with pain and sin and sorrow.

Even here the child-nature bears its fruit. Blake's unmodified horror is not that of an experienced man, but such as a child would feel, who, suddenly taken from his mother's garden, found himself in the dark walls of a prison. All its ugliness, tolerable to those who knew it, would be seen with loathing unspeakable by the child. Blake in this way saw the most dreadful side of dreadful things; more than we see; and he could not distinguish, as we do, any touches of light in the darkness. His expression, therefore, of experience was as exaggerated towards misery as his expression of innocence may seem to us exaggerated towards joy—and this is just the temper of a child towards the pain and pleasure, the evil and the good of the world. We have it here in a man, and an interesting problem it is. In both his pictures of the world, there are no gradations. Nevertheless, this was of use to him in his art. There is nothing like the burning whiteness of some of the *Songs of Innocence* in the whole of literature. He touches, without danger, and without shame of fear, the lightnings of the sword of innocence. We get the archetypes of good. And now we get the archetypes of evil. The same hand which drew the Lamb in

[1] These two poems on Lyca and her parents belong rather to the *Songs of Innocence*. I think they were a reversion to their type. There are two other poems in the *Songs of Experience*—*A Little Boy Lost*, and another, *A Little Girl Lost*—which are as ghastly as those on Lyca are lovely.

its essence drew also, with a fierceness of imagination, the fiercest of all beasts—not a tiger, but all tigers in one—the essential tiger.

Then, dreadfully opposed to the unchartered forgiveness of the *Songs of Innocence*, is the savage revenge, the very concentration of malice and hate, unmixed with any touch of relief, of the poem *A Poison Tree*. There is no dulness in hatred like this. It is driven and wrought by imagination. Webster alone might have approached it.

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning, with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

These intense extremes are very rare in literature.

The next thing to say about these *Songs of Experience* belongs in part to the history of the nineteenth century's early poetry. It is their sympathy with the aggressive ideas of the Revolution. Blake was a born Republican. Of all the men with whom he

associated (and the story goes that he saved Tom Paine from the gallows), he was the only one who donned in the open streets the red cap of the Republic. Long before Wordsworth and Coleridge, he put the militant ideas of the Revolution into verse. Shelley himself never spoke more fiercely of kings and priestcraft, of tyrannic fraud, force and oppression than Blake, full of wrath and menace, did in 1794, and in the prophetic books.

The America, one of these, takes as its theme the War of Independence, and the angels of Albion, who fight with the angels of the States, are not spared in the combat. Like Wordsworth, like Coleridge, he stood for the liberty of mankind against his own country. Patriotism was merged—that essential difference of the Revolution—in love of all mankind. Here is a passage which gives some idea of the loudness of Blake's cry for liberty. Humanity wakes, like us, at the sun-rising.

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations,
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrappèd up;
The bones of death, the covering clay, the sinews shrunk and dried,
Reviving, shake, inspiring, move, breathing, awakening,—
Spring, like redeemèd captives when their bonds and bars are burst.
Let the slave grinding at the mill run out into the field,
Let him look up into the heavens and laugh in the bright air;
Let the enchainèd soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years,
Rise, and look out! His chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open.

But he was much fiercer than that. Under the symbol of the Kings of Asia he represents the despots of Europe and their manner of getting their own way with the people. He makes them set afoot, with the help of the priesthood, famine and pestilence that the people may be slain. The Kings run out of their ancient woven dens,

> And the Kings of Asia stood,
> And cried in bitterness of soul—
> 'Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath,
> And the Priest for Pestilence from the fen,
> To restrain, to dismay, to thin
> The inhabitants of mountain and plain?'

Still more bitter and savage is the poem entitled *Lafayette.* In it the King and Queen of France consult what they shall do to bring the people to obedience. And the Queen orders temptation to vice to be doubled in the Paris streets so that pestilence may fly through them. And she calls for the army to consume the food of Paris that the people may be starved. These are the methods, he thought, of Kings—

> The strongest poison ever known
> Came from Cæsar's laurel crown.

The attack on priestcraft, on its religion of terror and restraint, on the inhuman God it made, on its dogmatic creeds by which it kept men slaves, was equally vigorous. His poem of *The Little Boy Lost* is a direct blow at the cruelty of a religion which replaces natural love by authority as the basis of

religion. The priest slays the child because it says it loves its father not because it is told to do so but out of its own heart. 'Lo! what a fiend is here,' he cries,

> One who sets reason up for judge
> Of our most holy mystery;

and he burns the child alive in a holy place. 'Are such things,' Blake asks, 'done on Albion's shore?' and the proper answer would be, since the poem is symbolic, that they were and are done. In another poem, *The Grey Monk*, the monk declares that all he has written has been the bane of every one he loved, and let loose on earth starvation, torture, misery, and war. Blake is especially furious with the use the priesthood in all ages have made of devilish means—of force and fraud—to establish the Kingdom of God. This is damnable, he thinks, and so it is. The world is saved and made divine by other weapons of war. And these are they:

> But vain the Sword and vain the Bow,
> They never can work War's o'erthrow.
> The Hermit's Prayer, the Widow's Tear
> Alone can free the World from fear.
>
> For a Tear is an Intellectual Thing,
> And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King,
> And the bitter groan of the Martyr's woe
> Is an Arrow from the Almightie's Bow.

Another stanza from another manuscript of the poem explains more fully the last verse:

But the tear of love—and forgiveness sweet,
And submission to death beneath his feet—
The tear shall melt the sword of steel,
And every wound it has made shall heal.

This is the very temper of Shelley thirty years before he wrote, so far forward did Blake reach. He reached further still: he reached into the social interests of the poetry which followed 1832. The things which concern the state of the poor, the starvation, misery, harlotry, cruelty to animals, the gambling passion which made guilt and hate and sorrow—

The harlot's cry from street to street
Shall weave Old England's winding-sheet.
The winner's shout, the loser's curse
Shall dance before dead England's hearse.

all that went against poetry—these were his interests at a time when no one felt much about them. He seized them as subjects of art more than a hundred years ago. In the *Holy Thursday*, in *The Chimney-Sweeper*, in the concentrated wrath of the little poem called *London*, we might think we heard—so modern it is—the utterance of those who among us now have ceased to believe in God because He permits the misery of the poor. I have no space in which to quote these poems in full, but to complete this sketch of the modernness of this work, so strange more than a century ago, Blake takes up the theory which is still stated, to the shame of those that state it, 'That the poor shall never cease out of the land, and that, if they did, Mercy and Pity

would lessen, and Charity have no reason.' This is given in a wild song called *The Human Abstract*, but it is best put in a poem from the Rossetti MS. :

I heard an Angel singing
When the day was springing :
'Mercy, pity, and peace
Is the world's release.'

Thus he sang all day
Over the new-mown hay,
Till the sun went down,
And haycocks lookèd brown.

I heard a Devil curse
Over the heath and the furze :
'Mercy would be no more
If there was nobody poor,

And pity no more would be
If all were as happy as we.'
At his curse the sun went dowo
And the heavens gave a frown.

These were some of the prophetic anticipations of the man, and they make his small piece of poetic work important in the history of poetry. There were others, as his love of animals, but I will treat of them in the answer to another question.

That question is—How far did Blake represent the naturalism which was reborn in English poetry after the artificial school of Pope, and also the romanticism which grew into poetry out of this naturalism?

The naturalism consisted in a reversion, with a new manner, new thought, and in new circumstances,

to the profound interest in the whole of human nature which characterised Chaucer and the Elizabethans, to all its phases in all ranks and in all countries—and it was mixed with a growing interest in the nature of animals. This was one side of the naturalism. The other side was an eager increase in the love of the natural world, which passed from interest in it as a background for human life into an interest in it, even a passion for it, for its own sake. Some of the elements of the romanticism which followed on this naturalism grew partly and naturally out of it. Others grew up independently of it, but were nourished by its atmosphere. The statement of what these elements were, and how they arose, would require a long essay and cannot be done here. What can be done is to mark briefly how far Blake was naturalist and how far romantic. Blake's naturalism is plain enough. It consists in his direct painting of certain very simple, as well as of very obscure, phases of human nature as yet scarcely touched by the English poets; and in an extremely simple, passionate, and spiritual treatment of both phases, as if the human nature in them belonged less to this earth than to the whole universe of spirit. One of these simple phases was the nature of childhood. We have already seen how important he made the child in English poetry.

Moreover, he placed our natural love of animals, and our pity for them, on a higher level than ever it had been before. Indeed, he introduced it in a new and more serious shape into English poetry;

and he shares it, before Wordsworth touched it, with Cowper and Burns. His tender song about the Lamb mingles its life up with the life of children, with the Divine Child, and with God the Father. The sheep feed through his poetry on a thousand hills in silent delight. The angels visit the caves of the wild animals and look into the nests of the birds to keep them from harm, and to pour sleep on their heads. God, who smiles on all, 'hears the wren with sorrows small.' 'Arise,' he cries—

> Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy,
> Arise and drink your bliss!
> For everything that lives is holy.

But this tenderness went further than either Cowper or Burns. In Blake's mysticism the animals became spiritual, at one with man and God, part of a living universe—visible symbols of invisible realities. Lyca's parents, seeking their lost child, come on a crouching lion and are terrified, but soon comforted, for

> They look upon his eyes
> Fill'd with deep surprise;
> And wondering behold
> A Spirit arm'd in gold.
>
> On his head a crown;
> On his shoulders down
> Flow'd his golden hair.
> Gone was all their care.
>
> 'Follow me,' he said,
> 'Weep not for the maid;
> In my palace deep
> Lyca lies asleep.'

This is the lion who watches the fold of humanity, when the sheep of the great Shepherd are sleeping. He extended the same feeling to all animals. To be cruel to animals, to limit their liberty, not to recognise their kindred to us, was a black iniquity—a spirit in man which injured not only those who possessed it, but the whole State. Against it the spiritual world was in revolt.

A Robin Redbreast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage!
A Dog starved at his Master's Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State.
A Horse misused upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood.
Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.
A Skylark wounded on the wing
A Cherubim does cease to sing.

He who shall hurt the little Wren
Shall never be belov'd by men.
The wanton Boy that kills the Fly
Shall feel the Spider's enmity.
He who torments the Chafer's sprite
Weaves a Bower in endless Night.
The Catterpillar on the leaf
Repeats to thee thy Mother's grief.
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh.

Then, in the happy world in which Blake lived, animals have a life of their own with one another. They talk together; they love and help one another. The Emmet has lost its way (I give a single example),

like a child in a wood, among the tall grass. Blake hears its crying and pities it, but he cannot help it. Then the Glow-worm intervenes, and Blake hears its voice. 'O my children,' cries the Emmet, 'do they cry? Do they hear their father sigh?'

> Pitying, I drop'd a tear;
> But I saw a glow-worm near,
> Who replied: What wailing wight
> Calls the watchman of the night?
>
> I am set to light the ground,
> While the beetle goes his round.
> Follow now the beetle's hum;
> Little Wanderer, hie thee home.

Nothing can be prettier, more full of life and love, than the world in which that little thing is conceived. This is a part of his naturalism.

Of the other side of it, of naturalism as concerned not with human or animal nature, but with the natural world outside of ourselves, I have written a little in the previous pages. I gave a few instances of his love of Nature for her own sake, such love as led us directly to Wordsworth. But it is necessary now to say that his love of Nature was not so much the love of outward Nature, as of the spiritual life of which Nature was but the sensible form. What we saw and heard with eyes and ears was a happy illusion; what was behind phenomena, that was the thing to love, admire, and with which to company. And when he passed beyond the flowers and the cloud, the stream and hill, into the living beings they

were, the realms in which he found himself were beautiful beyond compare in thought and sweet emotion. Thel, one of the daughters of the Seraphim, complains of the passing of all things, of her uselessness and theirs, and would lay her down and die. And the spiritual beings of the Lily and the Cloud, the Worm and the Clod of Clay answer her in lines too long to quote, but of so sweet, so beautiful a tenderness and spirituality, that they seem to transmute the universe and all its life from matter into spirit, from death and pain into life and love.

This is the realm in which we finally find Blake's naturalism when it has to do with the love of the natural world—a very different thing indeed from the love of Nature in the other poets. They celebrate the world the senses perceive, he that which is in the spirit. It is the supernaturalism of this species of naturalism. Yet in the higher poets who followed him there was something of this emotional thought of Blake's contained, at least theoretically contained. Shelley and Wordsworth saw infinite Thought and Love behind the appearance of Nature, but they gave full weight to that which the senses perceived. Blake did not; what we perceived was illusion, hid the reality but suggested it. What underlay illusion was the actual, and it was as real to Blake as our sensible world is to us—the fools of what we see and hear and feel.

> We are led to believe a lie
> When we see with, not through, the eye;

Or, expressed more clearly—

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower;
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

His symbolic use of natural objects, being a part of his pure mysticism, does not come within the scope of this essay, but is curiously interesting and imaginative. The Sun, the Moon, the Stars, mountains, streams, flowers, are loaded with spiritual meanings. When this is done by other poets, their work on the whole is neither suggestive nor exciting. But this symbolic world was Blake's native country, and he breathed its air with ease and joy. He was satisfied with knowing his own meaning in such verses, and quite indifferent about their comprehension by others; but since they are poetically expressed, they not only kindle the imagination of the reader, but also awaken a futile but agreeable curiosity which has nothing to do with poetry or the love of poetry. Beyond that curiosity, there is in them an attractive mystery as of a world unknown. When we read them, it is as if a door were momentarily opened into a world hidden from us, but of which we are capable of becoming citizens. I quote two little lyrics of this kind.

DAY

The Sun arises in the East
Cloth'd in robes of blood and gold,
Swords and spears and wrath increast
All around his bosom roll'd,
Croun'd with warlike fires and raging desires.

SOFT SNOW

I walked abroad on a snowy day:
I ask'd the soft snow with me to play:
She play'd and she melted in all her prime;
And the winter call'd it a dreadful crime.

On the whole this naturalism of Blake's ended in a fantastic but serious supernaturalism, his own, his very own.

How far he was romantic is another question. Some of his younger work, like his imitations of Ossian, and two wild ballads, belong to that reversion to the romantic past which was a feature of the time. But he soon left this behind, and I cannot trace any more of it in his later poetry. Mysticism overwhelmed it. Again, the melancholy note which Young introduces, which was so large an element in romanticism both in England and on the Continent, and which has lasted on into our own time, Blake had nothing to do with. The main element of his life and imagination was joy. And when he saw evil, it awakened in him no sentimental melancholy, but wrath, fury, the fiercest words, white fire of abhorrence—anything but melancholy. He thought little of the sorrow, failures, and trials of earth, still less of death, over which the romantics wail. Some are born, he says, to misery, some to sweet delight. In the delight sorrow is intertwined; in the sorrow joy. This is the truth; to realise it is to be at rest within, and safe in the storms.

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;

Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe;
And, when this we rightly know,
Safely through the world we go.

Two elements, however, characterising the romantics, emerged in Blake. One was an impassioned, over-weening individuality, which said, I am I; I am the whole world; I am God Himself. Of that there is not much to say in an essay about his poetry. It belonged to his mystic philosophy, if we can call it a philosophy; and the turn it took in him carried him away from all the forms into which this dominance of individuality was shaped by the romantics. Another was the element of wonder: and this arose from the slow upgrowth in men—after a time of clear intellectualism in which all the mystery of ourselves and of life was supposed to be explained—of a renewed sense of the mystery of life and the world, of its unintelligible problems, and of the sorrow and the wonder of the mystery. What are we? and what is the world? Is it actual or phenomenal only? What lies beneath the apparent? What beauty, what horror, what goodness, what truth, what life, is behind the illusion in which we live? When we are ill, the questions make us melancholy or miserable, and life is a vain searching, a fruitless cry. When we are well, we live in an endless wonder of the beauty and the truth of things.

A thousand phases of this appear in the poets of the nineteenth century. The phase of it which appeared in Blake was an emotional belief in a perfect world in which a man could live within absolute beauty, life, and love. This faith, with its inspiration, hurries its possessor beyond the world of sense into the spiritual. Not finding food enough on earth for its longing after perfect beauty, love, and knowledge, it creates a realm beyond this earth, where sorrow is not, nor old age, nor any law but love, and where the powers of genius immediately shape the conceptions of imagination. This desire, rising far away in early human nature, but in the rudest forms, was at first only naturalist. It passed into romanticism when it built up in thought a beautiful and perfect earth and sky, hidden away in the unknown oceans, where all was peace and love, and death was not, nor pain, nor storm. The early church created it in the home of the Phœnix for the Latin race. The mediævals placed it in the fairy world where Ogier and his fellows found immortal loves. The Irish invented Tir-na-nogue, where Oisin lived three hundred years in joy. It is in his exalting and changing the form of this conception that we meet in Blake all the romanticism of which he was now capable. He has escaped from this limited and dying world into an infinite and living world where all the sorrows of earth are not. The world of Ogier and Oisin is still material. Blake's world is immaterial. We fools only believe, he says, in what we perceive, and what

we perceive imprisons us. We are really in an illimitable, multitudinously peopled universe of Being; and he called on us to loosen ourselves from the bondage of phenomena, and to flee into the infinite liberty of this spiritual realm. He did not put this beautiful world into the future or far away. We could live in it now, if we chose, in innocence and unconsciousness of self; in eternity and omnipresence; in the sinless freedom from all restrictive law which is the dowry of perfect love; in tender joy, freed from fear, jealousy, and base desire; in that incessant outgoing of love which, ever moving away from self, finds itself at home in every grain of a universe which, made by the married Thought and Love of Deity, rejoices for ever in the Beauty which pervades it, and which is, it knows, the offspring of Divine Thought and Love. 'Poor prisoners,' Blake thought, 'of false imaginings, enchained by sense, there is your home,' and he puts the longing for it into many lovely verses. In *The Land of Dreams*, Earth has imprisoned the father and the boy. The poem represents the passion of those who are limited by the world of sense to escape from it:

Awake, awake, my little Boy!
Thou wast thy Mother's only joy;
Why dost thou weep in thy gentle sleep?
Awake, thy Father does thee keep.

'O, what Land is the Land of Dreams?
What are its Mountains, and what are its Streams?
O Father! I saw my Mother there,
Among the Lillies by waters fair.

'Among the lambs, clothèd in white,
She walked with her Thomas in sweet delight.
I wept for joy, like a dove I mourn,
O, when shall I again return?'

Dear Child, I also by pleasant streams
Have wander'd all Night in the Land of Dreams;
But tho' calm and warm the waters wide,
I could not get to the other side.

'Father, O Father! what do we here
In this Land of unbelief and fear?
The Land of Dreams is better far,
Above the light of the Morning Star.'

That is the longing in Blake's romanticism.

Enough has been now said (enough for the scope of this essay) of Blake's poetry as lyrical, as naturalistic, or romantic. Another part of his work —his mystical poetry—is not connected with the general stream of English poetry; belongs neither to the past nor the future of his time; is a strange backwater with its own scenery, its own flowers, its own animal life. We may take our boat into it out of the main stream, and row about its strange waters, and forget all the other English poetry for a time. There is little in it which recalls the other poets. It is chiefly contained in the Prophetic Books, with which this essay is not concerned. It appears, however, in many short poems which have a lyrical air. Some, like *Mary*, the *Golden Net*, the *Mental Traveller*, the *Crystal Cabinet*, *William Bond*, *Long John Brown*, excite an intellectual curiosity, but can scarcely be said to

awaken the pleasure that poetry ought to bring with it. What can be said for them is said with imaginative penetration by Mr. Swinburne. For my part, I desire a simpler world. It is only at intervals, when the mystic worlds open like fans before transitory moods, that men will love to sail on the mystic water of this blue lagoon, fed, not by the river of English poetry, but by deep-set fountains of its own. It demands its own terms and it is not difficult to learn them. But except we are very curious to enter into its region, the effort is scarcely worth our while, at least so far as the Prophetic Books are concerned.

But with regard to certain lyrics which contain or suggest Blake's views of religion, morality, and social relations, our action must be different. Their mysticism has a great deal to do with the problems of practical life, with their imaginative and spiritual treatment. In their mysticism appear certain steadfast elements which belong to the root of Blake's genius and character. To isolate them will help us to the further comprehension even of the *Songs of Innocence*, much more of the *Songs of Experience*.

The religious life of Blake is not a world in which morality is confused with religion. The moralities of society are left behind. The moral law is therein abrogated, or rather, as law, it is non-existent. Its indwellers love what is right and need no commands and no forbiddings. 'Thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' have no meaning there. One does not command a mother to love her child,

or forbid her to hate it. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and as a restraining power law ceases to be. That which the law orders is done, not because of the law, but because of love of goodness and love. Love takes duty in its stride. So far as morality is concerned, this was the view of Blake, and being an imaginative person and applying this principle at many out-of-the-way points, and with a reckless individuality, it led him into strange places of thought.

With this view of love as the sole master of life, a view held by almost every mystic, his religion was one of mysticism. It was a mysticism which never tried to reason out its faith, or to bind it down into intellectual propositions. It let itself fearlessly go into the infinite as into its proper home and satisfaction. Once there, it felt that its conceptions, which took form out of its emotions concerning God and man, were absolutely right, and that their rightness needed no proof. They proved themselves by their being. They were. That was enough. Blake felt that he thought with God and God with him. And when he thought thus, he was God and God was he. God and man were one.

In this exalted world of thought and its emotion, the general opinions of society and of churches on religion and on morality were not only thrown aside by Blake, they were for the most part denounced and abhorred by him. All reasoning on spiritual truths, all scientific theology, was an abomination. All conventional morality was devilish. All that

belonged to the senses was utterly repudiated. He does not care if his convictions violate all orthodox doctrine and all orthodox morality. He stands outside of this world in another, and from that other he speaks. With fearless step and with determined air he marches, resolute in his individuality, into the most tremendous labyrinths, and losing himself often therein, neither confesses nor knows that he is lost. Nay, in losing himself, he thinks to find himself.

In speaking of the *Songs of Experience* I said that Blake, looking on what seemed to him evil, that is on any violation of love, saw it with the horror with which innocence would see it. That was not the way in which he saw merely physical evil. He saw the pain of the world arising from the course of nature, and he had a great pity for it. But he had no horror of this, no hatred of it. If it came upon a happy inward spirit, it was so balanced, so modified, that it was scarcely to be considered as an evil. It was the common lot of man, and out of it arose or ought to arise fortitude, faith, and inward joy.

> Joy and Woe are woven fine,
> A clothing for the soul divine.
> Under every grief and pine
> Runs a joy with silken twine.

The case was different when he saw the physical and spiritual evil brought on man by cruel beliefs concerning God, by intolerant condemnations, by restrictive laws which used force to promote morality or orthodox belief. He pitied those who suffered from these villainies, but he turned with wrath on

those who made them suffer. He denounced in his poems, and all through the prophetic books, the priests who invented an unforgiving God, the theologians who maintained the rightness of the jealous Jehovah of the Jews, the atheists (for he struck all round) who, having no sense of the spiritual love which releases and comforts the guilty, insisted on the rigid moral law, invented over again the curse of its rewards and punishments, and limited the natural outgoing of man's natural desires.

These commandment-makers — the enemies of love, the supporters of hatred and cruelty, tyrants who used force to blockade the liberty of the soul — were the cause of the real evil of the world. He is never weary of picturing the devastation they make, and the wickedness of their work.

Love, not law, was the test of all action. Where love was, there was righteousness; where law was, sin was sure to be. The law, by forbidding, awakened the desire to sin. Where love was, freedom was; where law ruled, slavery prevailed. Where love lived, forgiveness reigned and saved; where law was master, cruelty, oppression, and misery degraded the conscience, weakened the intelligence and destroyed the body and soul of men. This restraining law was imposed on man by the Jehovah of the Jews, whom Blake looked on as a severe Pharisee, and whose image was made by the selfish, exacting, oppressive, unforgiving, jealous, and enslaving elements in the nature of man.

From this hard, angry, exacting God, who forced

man to sin when he laid down the fierce sanctions of the law—our Great Forbidder, as Eve called him in Milton's poem—Jesus, Blake declared, had set us free. He took away, so far as it forbade, restrained, and commanded, the moral law, and gave us back to love.

> He laid His hand on Moses' Law;
> The ancient heavens, in silent awe,
> Writ with Curses from Pole to Pole,
> All away began to roll.

Jesus did not, of his own will, punish sin. It had to reap its results, but He was not angry with it. He forgave it utterly. And in forgiving it, He saved us from it. Sin could not live in a man when he knew it was forgiven by God. When Jesus destroyed 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not,' He established in their stead the forgiveness of infinite love. The true punishment of sin was God's forgiveness of it; and the forgiveness was also its redemption. And this was just as true for man in his relation to God. Not till men forgave God for all the ill they thought He had done to them could they love God, and lose, in that love and in their own loving which forgave, the sense of sin and the desire to sin. God's forgiveness of man and man's forgiveness of God, these were the gates of paradise. They were built and established by love, and love itself was paradise.

Then Blake carried this doctrine of forgiveness further—to the relation between man and man. We are bound to forgive all wrong done to us, because we ourselves do wrong to our fellows and need

their forgiveness ; and our salvation and that of our comrades lie in our mutual forgiveness. When we resent the injuries another has done us, we increase his injuriousness, and we nourish our own anger into greater desire to do wrong to him ; but when we forgive his hatred, we forget our own, and we set the other free from his. Till we are forgiven we must go on hating and injuring and sinning. 'I have forgiven you,' cries one wrong-doer to another, 'and you are redeemed. When wilt thou redeem me by forgiving me? Then the salvation of both will be fulfilled.'

> And throughout all Eternity
> I forgive you, you forgive me.
> As our dear Redeemer said:
> This the Wine and this the Bread.

In forgiveness of sins there is self-annihilation. When absolute forgiveness is given by all, there is soon nothing left to forgive. It is the avenging punishment of sin which makes fresh sin ; it is the ruthless punishment of crime which doubles crime.

Then he applied this doctrine of love issuing in forgiveness, of love setting men free from restricting law, to human life ; and first with regard to the desires and passion of love between the sexes. These desires were natural and in themselves not wrong. It was the laws made by priests to restrict and bind them down which turned their satisfaction into sin ; and those who condemned the satisfaction of them as the worst of sins were far more guilty than those they condemned. The weakness of desire

yielded to through love, even when it was wrong, would have far more excuse with God than the calculated repression of desire when it ended in the moral pride that condemned those that erred, and in the cruelty which ruined their lives. The harlot who really loved would have more forgiveness from God than the intolerant Pharisee who thought her touch defilement; or than the ascetic who, having crushed in himself the impulse of passion, set himself to crush it out of humanity.

Then he took the same principle of the evil of restriction into the realm of mutual love. In the short poem of *The Clod and the Pebble* he contrasts two forms of human love. One is a love which always makes a heaven. It does not bind love down by any selfish chains. It has neither jealousy nor fear nor forbidding nor commands. The other love binds, is jealous, irritates, cries out—'I must have all to myself.' It is not love at all, it is self-love; and it makes life a hell.

'Love seeketh not Itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.'

So sung a little Clod of Clay,
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a Pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

'Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to Its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.'

The children of this emprisoning, evil form of love are jealousy which tortures and fear which degrades, and it has made love into a violation of love. 'Return,' cries the bard, to Earth, 'resume your ancient and lovely realm; set love free.' And Earth answers, her locks covered with grey despair, 'I cannot; jealousy, selfish fear, enforced abstinence have chained me and my indwellers. I am cursed by a law which has made me sin and forced me to know it.'

Break this heavy chain
That does freeze my bones around.
Selfish! vain!
Eternal bane!
That free Love with bondage bound.

This is the motive of a number of lyrics varied through various circumstances. *To my Mirtle*, though one of the shortest, is perhaps the most forcible.

To a lovely mirtle bound,
Blossoms show'ring all around,
O how weak and weary I
Underneath my mirtle lie!
Why should I be bound to thee,
O my lovely myrtle tree?

The Angel, *A Little Girl Lost*, *To Tirzah*, *My Pretty Rose Tree*, all illustrate this view of his—that the limitations of love, created by law, have been fatal to the happiness and goodness of man. In one fierce verse he cries aloud his anger at one result of the law:

Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair,
But Desire Gratified
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.

Then he turns on the religion which has adopted the pharisaic view of love. It says 'thou shalt not' to all bodily desires; it invents new sins, doubles and trebles the restrictions of natural passion, and is the curse of mankind. By this iniquity the Garden of Love is turned into a black graveyard:

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was fillèd with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

It is fitting to state plainly these views of Blake on a delicate subject. They underlie far more of his poems than those I have mentioned. Their spirit runs even through the *Songs of Innocence*. It pervades some of the prophetic books, into whose labyrinths I do not venture here. It appeared frequently in his conversation. It amazed some friends, it distressed others, and it was one of the reasons why he was called mad. It was a beloved theory, but it always, with Blake, remained a theory. It was never put into practice. The man was as innocent of indulgence as the dawn. He knew that in a world socially constituted as his and ours,

free love would entail untold sorrow and shame on women, even on men; and therefore to practise it would be a sin against love who was his master spirit. In this matter then, while he held to his principle, he omitted its practice; he would even have condemned it till the whole spirit of society was changed from selfishness to love.

There are many who hold these views but who never put them into action. But they speak of them as a protest against those who, dividing the body from the soul, have made the natural desires of the body into stains on the soul, and have by savage legality created sins and multiplied sins. Again, there are many who hold these views and practise them recklessly, and then they have been the cause of some of the greatest villainies that have defiled the earth. I do not think that Blake would have had any mercy on such men till they passed from the state of selfishness into that of love. Indulgence of this kind for the sake of money or lust or power, for any reason whatever except that of real love, would have been abhorrent to his spiritual nature, which, on the other hand, took up into the spiritual, and indeed as part of it, all bodily desires directed by true love. The whole theory, which is common enough in the thought of men and women, is a theory which, while the world is as it is, plays with fire. As long as those who hold it refrain from acting it, we may discuss it as a theory, especially as behind it sits the truth —that there is no true union which is not of love.

The principle here applied to sexual relations—that the law by its restrictions made sin; that the freedom which came of love made right—Blake applied elsewhere; to education and to religion. In education, all restraint laid upon the young was wrong, and spoiled the child. Children were born for joy, and were naturally good. They will grow into greater goodness if we let them live freely in their joy; when they are happy they are good. It is commanding this, forbidding that, which makes them into evil-doers. Even forcing them to learn is a pity. If we let them learn of their own impulse, lead them gently into what will interest them, they will get more of what is right for them, of what they can use well and beautifully, than they will by enforced education. 'Thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' spoil the whole nature of the child and injure his future life.

> O! father and mother—if buds be nip'd
> And blossoms blown away,
> And if the tender plants are strip'd
> Of their joy in the springing day
> By sorrow and care's dismay,
>
> How shall the summer arise in joy
> Or the summer fruits appear,
> Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
> Or bless the mellowing year,
> When the blasts of winter appear?

That, at any rate, is true. All our education, domestic and national, vitally needs this principle as its foundation.

In like manner the principle was applied by Blake

to religion. Love was its first law, if that could be called law which by its very nature was beyond all law. Love left the spirit free to move into the illimitable. Its world was above that of the senses which deceived the soul. It was equally above the work of the intellect when it forbade the spirit to transcend its demonstrations. The passion of the spirit for God, for perfection, for immortal life, and all the spiritual truths that aspiring passion led us to conceive, were seized on by the intellect, which had no business to touch these infinite matters, and shut up in a prison of formulas. The moods, the aspirations, the forms, the free expansion of the spirit of man into endless varieties of religious feeling and expression, were forced to live under the intolerant cruelties, and in the choking atmosphere of creeds, confessions, and an enforced ritual. Men were restricted at every point of the spiritual life. This, as before, was the curse of the world. Love was now cabined, cribbed, confined. Fear, oppression, slavery were its masters. The fear of God replaced the love of God, and He was made by the wicked makers of these restraints jealous, angry, unforgiving, an irresponsible judge, anything but a father. Love was thus destroyed in men, and faith perished along with love. And immediately superstition, which is fear and ignorance of God, was born again in humanity after Jesus had slain it. The spirit of life in religion, which is the spirit of love, was now subjected by a priestcraft which called itself Christianity to an outward law again, and crushed by

it. There were those who yielded to its evil power, and they were degraded into a slavery of the reason and the soul. There were those who resisted and denied this evil power, who abjured the law and set up love as their king, who proclaimed forgiveness as God's justice, who made no restriction on the way in which men thought and felt about religious truth, who let faith and love create with freedom their own forms and their own ritual. These were the martyrs of the sorrowful earth; driven by priests, churches and sects out of a world which was not worthy of them, slain in torment, made to walk with lions. In a terrible poem Blake embodies this view. It is too long to quote, but its title is *A Little Boy Lost.*

He lived till he was near seventy. He was always poor, always unfamed, and always happy. There is a story of a beautiful lady who was one day brought to see him. He looked at her and said, 'May God make this world, my child, as beautiful to you as it has been to me.' Thus, formed of love and joy, his constant life was Praise of God. 'What,' he said once, and it reminds us of a phrase of Handel's, 'what, when the sun rises, do you see? A round disc of fire, something like a guinea! O no, no, I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying—

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.'

SIR WALTER SCOTT

I

THIS essay will treat, first, of the relation of the poetry of Scott to the time in which he lived, then of the poetry itself, and lastly, of its relation to the previous Scottish poetry. But before I come to these things I will draw attention to the most remarkable power of his poetry; its power of kindling romantic feeling for the past, that romantic feeling which is mingled of love, reverence, and wonder—love of the beauty of the past in splendour of pageant and procession and dress and buildings, in battle and battle array, in religion and art; reverence for its noble deeds and sacrifices, its chivalrous adventures for love or honour, its spirit of high courage and faithfulness in war and peace, its contempt for a base or a material life, its carelessness of wealth and of pain and death when compared with honour; its quick, frank, and noble passions, out of which natural poetry continually arose; its ideal of the knightly spirit; its open-handed expenditure of time and money, without ignoble restriction, for the sake of love, for the sake of beauty, for the sake of the future, and for the sake of the state and religion; and, finally, wonder for

its mysteries of thought and feeling, in love, in superstition, in legend, in transmuted myths of nature, in the wild tales of the wild creatures of moor and mountain lands and wood, in the imaginations of faery and of the far-off islands where dwelt the ever-living in peace and joy. Nor can I omit those strange and often noble aspirations towards the wonders of the unknown, out of which grew the magic, alchemy, and astrology of the Middle Ages. This it is which, in all its forms, Scott's poetry has the power to kindle, and the power has blest and adorned the life of humanity. Its more particular result was the clothing of ancient places belonging to his own country with a robe of romance which will never wear out as long as the English language lasts; and the support and cherishing of this romance in the mind of men, and in the soul of the young.

As to the first, its power was based on a great knowledge of the history of his native land, on a personal exploration of the border lands of England and Scotland and of the border between the Lowlands and the Highlands. He had walked over all this wild country and studied its natural scenery, its farmers, its ruder indwellers, its ruined peels and castles, its tales of war and passions, its legends and its songs. Nothing escaped that observant eye or deserted that accurate memory. And he did this work and retained its results with a rare intensity of love for it and for the land of his birth which, living in a prolific and creative imagination, itself thrilled

always with wonder and delight, made every valley, stream, mountain, woodland, lake, farmhouse, castle, abbey, village, and town so romantic to him that he clothed them with romance for others. The whole land became alive, walked and warred, thought and felt with passion, spoke and sang. The very names take personality, and breathe and live, and his use of them in poetry is one of the most brilliant things in literature.

This was a great result to accomplish, and it acted with extraordinary force on the readers of his poetry. It filled them with a strong desire to see and know the country in which so much romance of the past, of men and landscape, still existed. It opened out the land to eager voyaging, and created the eagerness to visit it. It brought romance home to the hearts of men and women and balanced the materialism of the age. And when once this romantic love was awakened for Scotland, it stirred men to feel it for their own land, for its scenery and history, and for all its past. Englishmen trained on Scott felt quickly the romance of Canterbury, Windsor, Plymouth, of the villages and scenery of Somerset, of Yorkshire, of Warwick. Then they applied the new elements in their soul to foreign lands, and in Italy, France, Spain, and Germany made the places they visited as alive as Scott had made the Lowland and the Highland border.

In all this cherishing of romance in the minds of men, and especially of the young, the work he did was beautiful; and it continues, and will continue, to

exercise its power. I am sorry for the children who are not brought up on the poetry of Scott. It is an excellent foundation for the appreciation and love of all other poetry; it lays up in the minds of those who care for it elements of enchanting pleasure in after-life.

My father waked us every morning with snatches from the *Lay*, from *Marmion*, and the *Lady of the Lake*, and the day was haunted with their charm. We learnt for ourselves more than half of the poems. Wherever we played, or walked on the hills or by the sea, Scott taught us to build up tales of war and love around the names and scenery of the places, and to fill them with romantic adventures. The first expedition I made after I was twenty-one was made with my brother to Loch Katrine and the Trosachs, to Glenfinlas and Stirling, and it was one long ravishment; nor did I enjoy Wordsworth, who was then my companion, the less, but the more, because I was living every step of the way with Scott. Many years afterwards, when years of London life had, as I thought, lessened the romantic wonder, I went north and found myself in the early morning looking from a height over a castle famed in Border minstrelsy, and beyond it lay the Solway and its hills, Lanercost, Askerten, Bewcastle, Liddesdale, Teviot and Eskdale, and on the right the ridges of the Roman Wall, the valleys, the rolling rig and flow of the Border mosses and the Border hills. There was scarcely a single name of river, mountain or sea-estuary, castle or farmhouse, which was not

known to me from the poetry of Scott. I leaned over the gate and looked long upon the poetic land, and it seemed as if all the dew of youth fell upon me again, as if I were again in the ancient world of adventure, romance, love and war, which we have replaced by science and philosophy, trade and misery, luxury and poverty. But it was to Scott I owed the pre-eminent pleasure of that hour, an hour the impression of which I kept like a precious jewel, and which I have never lost.

This is the power of Scott, and this a result of his work. Every boy and girl who reads him with love feels the same, every man and woman who has read him with love has a similar experience. It is a great power and a great result, far more important than those imagine who, limiting themselves to the poetry of thought alone, are apart from the romance of the past, and from the freshening spirit it brings to an over-curious, over-wearied, over-peopled life. To be the voice and the inspirer of the young and of their romance ; to have their praise, which is contained in their pleasure, from age to age ; to be the kindler of their first joy, in nature, in ancient historic places, in the story-telling of wild love and sorrow ; to establish that pleasure, so that in after-years they carry with them the power to make all lands romantic ; to nourish into strength and passion the romantic heart—this is Scott's enduring fame as a poet. It is a just fame, worth a man's life, and it is the final criticism of his place as a poet for humanity.

Deep in the general heart of man
His power survives.

Having said this, we may now say that the range of his poetry was closely limited. He did not think much of his own poetry; he thought too little of it. He felt it was careless, flowing unrestrained, inaccurate in rhyme, frequently unimpassioned, sometimes made to order, without any depth of thought. And these things are often true of it. He stands far behind Wordsworth, Keats, or Shelley. His truest genius belongs to prose. But his three first narrative poems are brilliant things, and I have dwelt on their romantic power. The rest of them are more or less manufactured.

He was greatest in his lyrics. Many of them are poor in quality, curiously careless, curiously uninspired. Others are brilliant with martial fervour, with the gladness of battle, with the cavalier spirit. Others are full of the woodland spirit, of the morning hunting, of the joy of waking into a new day. And some are of an exquisite tenderness, solemnity, evening sadness, and spiritual beauty, so fine, so delicate, even so subtle in feeling, that they place him for the moment side by side with the great poets. Even when he gave up poetry as a portion of the work of his life, he continued in his novels to write now and then lyrics of this noble kind. The most perfect of them, the ballad of *Proud Maisie*, is in the *Heart of Midlothian*, and *County Guy*, lovely with its atmosphere of the eternal romance of evening and of love, comes from

Quentin Durward. But these belong to the rapid asides of men of genius, and I will not dwell upon them in this place. Scott's main poetic work was that of narrative poetry, and of narrative limited to one type. Time has settled the limits of their poetic genius; and no one, as I have said, understood those limits better than Scott himself. When he had finished his first three poems, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and the *Lady of the Lake*, he knew that he had got all the best ore out of this vein, and that there was, apart from his lyrics, only this one vein. He followed these first poems with *Rokeby*, the *Lord of the Isles*, and the *Bridal of Triermain*, all in the same class, but they were done not for their own sake, but rather with the express purpose of getting money to build and settle his house. They bear the mark of effort. The old lightness of touch, the gallop over the moors of poetry, if I may use such a metaphor, the natural drifting of the narrative, the swift, passionate, and clear view of nature, the romantic childlikeness of the work, are all wearied. And he practically left poetry behind in 1814, when he found the first chapter of *Waverley* in a drawer of his table, and, finishing the book, began a new career and a greater fame.

That date, or better, perhaps, 1815, may be said to close the poetic life of Scott. *Don Roderick*, *Triermain*, *Rokeby* were published before 1814; the *Lord of the Isles* appeared in 1815. The date enshrines a remarkable coincidence. It marks the

passing away of the poetry which was influenced so largely by the outbreak of the French Revolution. When the ideas of the Revolution appeared again in the poetry of Shelley and Byron, they clothed themselves in other garments than those they wore in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. These men, with various power and depth, represented in their earlier poems the enthusiasm belonging to those ideas; then in later poems the reaction from them; then the indignation which the false and treacherous form into which Napoleon threw them awakened; then the sympathy with which the struggle of England for liberty against Napoleon was received by the world; then the exhaustion when the struggle was over, in which exhaustion poetry ceased to be moved by any public interest or public emotion in the present, and turned either to the past or to the daily human life of the passions for its subjects. That decay of the revolutionary impulse reached its nadir in 1814 and 1815. The battle of Waterloo is not only an historical, it is a poetic date.

Scott represents the reverse side of the revolutionary impulse, and his representation of it in poetry came also to a close in 1814 and 1815. The fall of the Bastille in 1789 was the fall of the old régime, and it awoke no enthusiasm in Scott. Wordsworth and Coleridge celebrated it with rapture. The new life it seemed to promise for mankind they sung with triumph and joy. In all their

poems of that time there is no trace of any love of the past; every glance is fixed on the future. But exactly the opposite is the position of Scott. He felt the new impulse, heard the new cry ringing in his ears; and he, the Jacobite, the adorer of the old, who loved an adventure of Bruce more than the overthrow of the Bastille, whose spirit lived in the ancient while his body moved in the modern world, saw in the fresh movement of humanity that which would destroy all he loved, and set up all he hated because it spoiled what he loved. Therefore, with that unconscious working of genius towards the defence of what is greatly loved, and towards its beautifying in order that others may love it, he set forth in 1802 the volumes of the Border Minstrelsy, in which he had collected, revised, or rewritten the ballads; restored the scenery, the manners, the adventures, the life and passions of the time that filled his thought and his affection. Perhaps, he thought, I may stem the tide which is setting towards the new; at least, I may gather under my wing all those who love and cherish the past. If it is to vanish away for ever, we shall together mourn its fate. Then followed, in support of the same protest, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and the very title suggests the position which Scott assumed. The minstrel's harp was his 'sole remaining joy.' 'His withered cheek and tresses gray Seemed to have known a better day.'

> The last of all the Bards was he,
> Who sung of Border chivalry;

For, well-a-day! their date was fled,
His tuneful brethren all were dead;
And he, neglected and oppress'd,
Wish'd to be with them, and at rest.

It may be that Scott thought in 1805, when this poem was published, of his own position as a poet in the midst of a world which, in the passion of a mighty change in the present, ignored or despised the past it had overthrown, and sketched himself in the Minstrel. I am sure that the description of the revival of the minstrel's spirit when he heard the long-forgotten melody of his youth, is the description of the temper of his own soul.

But when he caught the measure wild
The old man raised his face, and smiled;
And lightened up his faded eye
With all a poet's ecstasy!
In varying cadence, soft or strong,
He swept the sounding chords along:
The present scene, the future lot,
His toils, his wants, were all forgot;
Cold diffidence, and age's frost,
In the full tide of song were lost;
Each blank, in faithless memory void,
The poet's glowing thought supplied:
And while his harp responsive rung,
'Twas thus the latest Minstrel sung.

It pleased him, no doubt, that the success of the poem was so great. That success fell in with the reaction against the Terror, with the horror the aristocracy, the church, the landowners, the wealthy, felt for the overthrow of all the privileges which

God Himself, they believed, had conferred on them. The 'cultivated' people, hating the baser sort who had risen to the top in the Revolution, and forgetting the vast villainies of the 'gentlemen' of France, went back in their judgments to the times of chivalry, and cried that the high-hearted romantic past was better than this base and cruel present. Even those who clung to the new ideas, while they repudiated the form given to them by France, had pleasure in seeing the picture of the past in poetry. To make this impression deeper, Scott wrote *Marmion* in 1808, and the *Lady of the Lake* in 1810. The former raised his reputation. It was a better poem than the *Lay*; but it did not make the past so delightful as its predecessor, nor exercise the same power over the chivalric imagination. It was not so romantic, and the character of *Marmion* was ignoble. He ill represented chivalry.

The *Lady of the Lake*, on the other hand, made thrill with romance a whole land, whose memories were of the past, whose Highland indwellers seemed to belong to a time more remote than that of James IV.; and so charmed the world, that it opened up the lower Highlands and their history to the pilgrimage and the imagination of all English-speaking peoples. Yet, even as Scott began the poem, he felt that the power he had was only sufficient to carry him through it on an equal wing. In spite of the poem's immense success, he understood in his secret soul that this kind of romantic poetry was apart from the general movement of

mankind, and that it must pass away. His force had made the beautiful dead alive, but the time was near at hand when it must be buried; and one of the verses which preface the *Lady of the Lake* will prove this sufficiently. He is speaking to the Minstrel Harp, whose burden of old was knighthood's dauntless deed and beauty's matchless eye.

O wake once more! how rude soe'er the hand
That ventures o'er thy magic maze to stray;
O wake once more! though scarce my skill command
Some feeble echoing of thine earlier lay:
Though harsh and faint, and soon to die away,
And all unworthy of thy nobler strain,
Yet if one heart throb higher at its sway,
The wizard note has not been touched in vain.
Then silent be no more! Enchantress, wake again!

With force of fire and charm he struck this harp; but never again did the strings emit the same natural and noble sound. The exhaustion which fell upon the other poets after their excitement against the past and for the present fell on him after his excitement for the past against the present. The reasons why both were tired were different, but the result was the same; and Waterloo marks the final date.

Afterwards a new form of the old impulse was represented by Byron and Shelley and others, but the first poetic warriors who sprang to their feet at the fall of the Bastille, and fought for or against the idea it crystallised, retired finally from that battle, and either took up other themes or gave up writing poetry altogether. Scott did the latter

thing, and he records his exhaustion, and his consciousness of the exhaustion of others, in verses scattered among his inferior poems. He speaks of himself and his brother bards, in 1811 as weak minstrels of a laggard day, timid and raptureless, a faint degenerate band, and the phrases mark how deeply he felt the apathy of imagination which had now invaded England.[1]

It is true he also, like the other poets, threw himself with all the excitement he could muster into the struggle which preceded Waterloo. 'Who that ever shared them,' he says, 'shall forget

The emotions of the spirit-rousing time!'[2]

It is true he writes with studied praise of Pitt, of Nelson, even of Fox, of those who fought in the great war, of Brunswick, of Sidney Smith, of Abercromby, of Wellington, of all who fell at Waterloo, of the whole brave fight, maintained well through good report and ill in his country's cause—

In thy just cause and in thy native might,
And in heaven's grace and justice constant still;

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[1] Here is the passage:

But we, weak minstrels of a laggard day,
Skill'd but to imitate an elder page,
Timid and raptureless, can we repay
The debt thou claim'st in this degenerate age?
Thou giv'st our lyres a theme that might engage
Those that could send thy name o'er sea and land,
While sea and land shall last; for Homer's rage
A theme; a theme for Milton's mighty hand—
How much unmeet for us, a faint degenerate band!

[2] *Lord of the Isles*, canto sixth, i.

but the strange thing is, that even in this he has no real fire. He writes with no passion; the poetry is powerless. Wordsworth, who had been set on flame by the Revolution, carried his fire into his poetry against Napoleon and for the fight of England with Napoleon. The present and its living excitement had entered into him. Scott could not even—his fire as a poet was so entirely lit from the past—be kindled by the glory and sacrifice of the war in the Peninsula into poetry worthy of the theme. Of course, as a citizen he was greatly stirred by the war and England's victory, but not as a poet. It is almost absurd to read his patriotic strains concerning the events of his own time, so cold, so faded are they, so entirely different from those with which he celebrates the ride of Deloraine, the battle of Flodden, or the games at Stirling. He was not of the world in which he was born—as long as he wrote poetry.

Hence the prevailing temper of his poetry is sadness. Ruskin says he was sad, and alleges that the age was sad, and Scott, representing it, became sad. But the age, though it became sad (to the poets, not to the nation) in 1815, was not at all sad among the poets in 1790, in 1800, in 1810, when Scott was young. Much of the sadness in his poetry is no doubt due to his early love disappointment. It coloured his whole life. But there is a general sadness for which this does not account, a sadness which is like a veil over all his poetry. And the real truth is that, as a poet, it was his

apartness from the fresh movements of his age that made him sad. A man cannot write poetry away from the main drift of his time without feeling—if he have the poet's sympathy with humanity—his isolation, and the more sympathy he possesses the more he feels his isolation to be sorrowful. The age was not sad, as an age, save among the poor, whom the war reduced to utter misery; but their cries did not reach the ear of Scott. The age was either eagerly republican, eagerly patriotic, or eagerly materialist, and, as the last conquered in the end, the age became not sad, but contentedly apathetic to ideas, to anything but peace and pride and a full purse. No, Scott's sadness was the sadness of one who had no sympathy for the present, who loved the past and who saw that the past was ruined. That was the true root, as it was the true reason that his poetic power was soon exhausted. He had but one source of poetic emotion, and the source of that emotion was long since dead. To continue mourning over a tomb, and worshipping the relics in it kills at last passion, intelligence, and power. The world, listening to the wailing voice, is wearied, and finally the mourner himself. Scott was tired; and turned, in his desire to be in touch with a living humanity, to paint in his novels the feelings, the humour, the daily life of the Scottish people, of the rich and learned and poor that surrounded him; and he did this even in the novels which treated of the past. The novels are not sad, save at just intervals. In them he found his true power, his true joy, and his

true theme, like Wordsworth, in the eternal present of the human heart.

There is frequently in the poems, but by no means always in the prose, a sadness in his descriptions of the ruins of abbey and castle and famous scenes which, when he wrote, were desolate. He is filled with regret for the vanished splendour, the forgotten deeds, the long exhausted wars, the great fighters who contend no more, the mouldered world of chivalry. Turner, the painter, often expressed the same sadness. Ruskin seemed to think that Turner was always sad when he painted places filled with the memories of the past. It is by no means always so, nor is it so always in the novels of Scott. But Turner did often set over shattered castle, desecrated abbey, ruined town, the scarlet clouds of storm, the sad and peaceful sympathy of the sunset, the calm white silence of a regretful dawn. On the other hand, like Scott, he was often just as joyful of heart. No man has ever painted with a fuller rapture the leaping passion of sunrise; or the glory of the sky above a landscape where, in a great battle, liberty has been won. He painted the spirit of the place, now sad, now serene, now happy. For example, Scott's description of Norham, even in its glory, sets it in the fading light of sunset. We hear the sorrow in the tone of the verse. If we wish to see it expressed in another art, and in harmony with the deep regret of Scott, we have only to look at every drawing which Turner did of Norham. Some of them are of sunrise over the castle, but the

glory of the sunrise in them only enhances the sorrow of the broken and ruined keep. One is of sunset, and though the castle is in a golden light, the river, swirling by the rock in darkening curves, is tragic with the purple of Tintoret. Turner, like Scott at Crichtoun Castle, in that inimitable phrase, had heard the streams of Tweed 'repine.' And the poetry of Scott, whenever he binds up natural scenery with human life, is sad with Turner. The loveliest lines he writes are of nature in the evening hour, and he almost invariably passes from it into sorrow, or the memory of sorrow, or the presentiment of it. The end of *County Guy* is 'Where is County Guy?' The end of 'The sun upon the lake is low' is 'Leonard tarries long,' and the fall of the verse in those perfect pictures of evening always suggests to me a prophecy of trouble.

Of the songs which have to do with human life some are gay enough, but the best are songs of sorrow; of the tragic fates that smite the young, the beautiful, the proud. Rosabelle perishes in the storm. Maisie, the proud lady, hears her own knell. The Maid of Neidpath's heart is broken. The true lover dies far from his sweetheart; the false lover dies in the bloody battle. The light lover rides away and leaves the girl to weep; and the ballads that bear this tragic burden, like *The Eve of St. John*, are the best. The closing verses to the *Lady of the Lake* pass from the quietude of the darkening hills, and the deer seeking covert, and the piping of

the herd-boy to the twilight, to the remembrance of the dreadful pain of life—'the secret woes the world has never known,'

> When on the weary night dawned wearier day,
> And bitterer was the grief devoured alone.

Even in his youth, as he looked back upon nature, there is this sorrowful note:

> Blackford! on whose uncultured breast,
> Among the broom, and thorn, and whin,
> A truant-boy, I sought the nest,
> Or listed, as I lay at rest,
> While rose, on breezes thin,
> The murmur of the city crowd,
> And, from his steeple jangling loud,
> St. Giles's mingling din.
> Now, from the summit to the plain,
> Waves all the hill with yellow grain;
> And o'er the landscape as I look,
> Nought do I see unchanged remain,
> Save the rude cliffs and chiming brook.
> To me they make a heavy moan,
> Of early friendships past and gone.

This was written in 1808. The note is still more unhappy in 1817, when of the poetic impulse little remained but a few lyrics. This which I quote is perhaps the most personal of Sir Walter's poems; and its beauty is great.

> The sun upon the Weirdlaw Hill,
> In Ettrick's vale, is sinking sweet;
> The westland wind is hush and still,
> The lake lies sleeping at my feet.

Yet not the landscape to mine eye
Bears those bright hues that once it bore;
Though evening, with her richest dye,
Flames o'er the hills of Ettrick's shore.

With listless look along the plain,
I see Tweed's silver current glide,
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruin'd pride.
The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,—
Are they still such as once they were?
Or is the dreary change in me?

The sadness, as I have said, of this poem is mainly personal, and momentary. Yet it falls in with that general note in his poetry, the melancholy of which I trace to the feeling underlying his poetic work that the past he loved was out of harmony with the present; that he himself in his poetry was apart from his age and the hopes of men in it.

Ruskin's view is the exact opposite of this. His statement that Scott represented the sadness of the age ought to prevent our ever finding Scott happy in man or nature, but we know that this sadness, for the most part, disappeared in his novels when he did get into close union with the human life of his country. Moreover, it disappears when in his poetry he is with nature, quite alone and apart from man; or when he is excited by hunting or by the wild war and triumph of the Highlander. Even Ruskin allows Scott's joy in the natural world, nay, he insists upon it. When Scott lost himself in absolute enjoyment of nature he lost the sense of his apart-

ness from his age. In that he was not divided from the other poets. Deep pleasure in nature for her own sake was now universal in poetry. And when Scott had forgotten those elements in the modern world which he hated, and felt when as a child he read his first ballads; when he found himself in a place like the Trosachs, untrodden even by the foot of the shepherd, he flung himself into rejoicing, delightful, rich and keen description —frankly objective, never subjective, never weighted or involved with thought, always of the visible, never of the invisible beneath the visible, never of the spiritual underlying the material. Solitude made him happy, and, afar from men, his muse drew near to him, and then she smiled. 'My muse,' he says, 'will seldom wake,

> Save by dim wood and silent lake;
> She is the wild and rustic Maid,
> Whose foot unsandall'd loves to tread
> Where the soft greensward is inlaid
> With varied moss and thyme;
> And, lest the simple lily-braid,
> That coronets her temples, fade,
> She hides her still in greenwood shade,
> To meditate her rhyme.
> And now she comes! The murmur dear
> Of the wild brook hath caught her ear,
> The glade hath won her eye;
> She longs to join with each blithe rill
> That dances down the Highland hill
> Her blither melody.'

Now, this enjoyment of pure nature was part of

the poetic movement of Scott's time, and part of the ideas out of which grew the Revolution. So far, then, we may say that he was in harmony with the forward ideas of his time, and to this partial union of his with the new thoughts of men I may, I think, partly trace the absence of sadness in his poetry of nature when he wrote of her for her own sake only, and without bringing human associations into the impressions she made upon him. But the joy he had then in pure nature was not long-lived. He needed to associate her beauty with the soul and the works of man.[1] That also *we* come to need, but we, taught by such men as Wordsworth, associate it with the human interests of the present as well as with the history of the past. Scott left out the present in his poetry. He did not bind up nature with humanity as it moved excitedly forward

[1] 'The romantic feelings which I have described as predominating in my mind gradually rested upon, and associated themselves with, the grand features of the landscape around me; and the historical incidents or traditional legends connected with many of them gave to my admiration a sort of intense impression of reverence which at times made my heart feel too big for its bosom. From this time the love of natural beauty, more especially when combined with ancient ruins, or remains of our fathers' piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion which I would willingly have gratified by travelling over half the globe.'

The same thought is touched more gracefully in the epilogue to the *Bridal of Triermain*:

> But, Lucy, we will love them yet,
> The mountain's misty coronet,
> The greenwood, and the wold;
> And love the more, that of their maze
> Adventure high of other days
> By ancient bards is told.

in his own time, but only with humanity as it moved eagerly in the past. And then, of course, his nature poetry became sad.

I may perhaps be permitted to expand this particular statement further. Scott, with his peculiar hatred of the new ideas concerning man, and his retreat to the past because of that hatred, was in a confused and ill-fortuned position. He, like the rest of the world of his time, had gained from the ideas which preceded the French Revolution the love of wild and solitary nature; the feeling that we should find in her an answer to our trouble, a source from whom we might draw lessons of simplicity of feeling, of pure sentiment unmixed with wrong, of greater nearness to the heart and life of the universe; the belief that in such communion we should find both peace and joy. This was one of the ideas which filled many French and English writers before 1789. It was everywhere afloat. The fury of the Revolution blotted it out for a time, but it belonged to its original ideas; and it grew steadily and naturally, uninterrupted by violent political storm, among the English poets. In them it was slowly harmonised with the overthrow of the past system of society and the prophecy of a new system; and in them, on the whole, there is, after Young, less and less sadness, and more and more of a sacred and noble joy in the study of nature. When the progress of this thought had reached Wordsworth, nature is loved for herself alone, and the past, or regrets for it, rarely intrude into the

poetry which delights in her. And, finally, when humanity is introduced into natural description, it is chiefly the humanity of the present, not of the past, the simple humanity of the poor whose lives and passions the ideas of the Revolution ennobled and sanctified.

Scott, on the other hand, mixed up with the idea of the new time concerning nature other thoughts which belonged to the old time; he imposed on the solitudes of nature and on her loveliness, seen now in the wild freshness the freed spirit of man conferred on her, regrets for a vanished glory. When he lived with Nature he was a child of the new spirit, but he combined with that spirit a worship of the spirit of the past. Naturally, the two did not fit or mingle into harmony. The two elements, one drawn from the living present, the other drawn from the dead past, produced in his mind a confusion of feeling, and made him sorrowful as a poet.

We have not this confusion. We can mingle pleasure in the memory of a romantic past with pleasure in nature. But then we are not, as Scott was, in the centre of the battle. The battle is decided. We love the romantic side of the past, but we do not regret it. We are content with its death, we do not wish to bring it back again. Our feeling, then, is unmixed with questioning, with any doubt of itself. The river on which we sail when we live with nature ought to be a free and happy stream, unless we are fools enough to gather over its waters the troubles of our inner life.

As the years went on, and Scott took up in prose the work he had begun with poetry; as the wrath he felt at the Revolution lessened with its overthrow; as England seemed, after Waterloo, to bring back the ideas of the past—his sadness was turned into quiet, and pleasure with the course of things; and his novels have lost the sadness of his poetry. No life then could have been more justly happy than his, and it may not be apart from this portion of my essay to close it with the words which Wordsworth wrote of Sir Walter when last they met, before the great creator went to Italy to seek the health Tweed and all her hills could not afford him. They met and wandered together to Newark, adown the vale and stream of Yarrow; and Wordsworth, like Scott in earlier days, saw sorrow in the loveliness of nature, for him with whom he walked he thought he should see no more. But out of sorrow he rose into a brighter thought; he saw the sunshine of spirit which had brooded over the great and noble life which Scott had lived. Nature and humanity lived in his work; all mankind would be for ever grateful to him. Therefore he said:

> And if, as Yarrow, through the woods,
> And down the meadow ranging,
> Did meet us with unaltered face,
> Though we were changed and changing;
> If, *then*, some natural shadows spread
> Our inward prospect over,
> The soul's deep valley was not slow
> Its brightness to recover.

For thou, upon a hundred streams,
By tales of love and sorrow,
Of faithful love, undaunted truth,
Hast shed the power of Yarrow;
And streams unknown, hills yet unseen,
Wherever they invite thee,
At parent Nature's grateful call,
With gladness must requite thee.

It is not nature only who makes that call for gratitude, but the heart of man.

Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue
Than sceptered king or laurelled conqueror knows
Follow this wondrous Potentate.

They follow him still, and will follow him evermore.

II

It is well now, before I pass to the hereditary elements in Scott's poetry, to say something more particularly of the poems themselves. No one claims him as one of the greater poets; and, though the immense success of his poems might have flattered another man into making this claim, it did not for a moment induce Scott to make it. On the contrary, he had too low an opinion of his poetic work, and disparaged it too much. What he liked in it was its unconfined rush, its freedom from artificial rules, its natural wild carelessness—

wild as cloud, or stream, or gale,
Flow on, flow unconfined, my Tale!

He knew he could not do what the loftier poets could do, and he did not try to reach their goal. But all the more, he determined to use frankly the powers he had, and to let them have their bold and happy way. This was his wisdom ; and it is part of his clear-seeing, lovable character, in which there is not one trace of morbid, self-considering, envious or self-deceiving feeling. 'I cannot follow,' he might say, 'or study the great masters. The careful rhyme, regular movement, and stately composition are not for me ; but I may give pleasure by writing as my nature impels me—

> For me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
> The classic poet's well-conned task ?
> Nay, Erskine, nay—On the wild hill
> Let the wild heath-bell flourish still ;
> Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
> But freely let the woodbine twine,
> And leave untrimmed the eglantine :
> Nay, my friend, nay—Since oft thy praise
> Hath given fresh vigour to my lays ;
> Since oft thy judgment could refine
> My flattened thought, or cumbrous line ;
> Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
> And in the minstrel spare the friend.
> Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
> Flow forth, flow unrestrained, my Tale ! '

It is this animation, impulsive ardour, a freedom as of wild nature herself, this clear vision of all he loved outside of himself and swift expression of it, this delightful naturalness, this joyful freedom, which charm us in his poetry.

I am not sure that the vivacity and variety of Scott's poetry is not as well, perhaps better, represented in the short songs, ballads, and minstrel-pieces as in the long poems. Like the long poems, they do not, save in two or three fateful lyrics, rise into the loftier and graver regions of poetry, but, on their level and within their sphere, they can express with equal power the splendid eagerness of life or its melancholy fates, or, indeed, the quiet region of subdued feeling which exists between youthful ardour and tragic pain. In that quiet region there is nothing better in English lyric than *County Guy* and *The Sun upon the lake is low*, and the little poem entitled *The Weirdlaw Hill*. They seem to be written by the evening light itself, in its resigned, still, veiled atmosphere; encompassed by beauty, but by beauty which is passing away. Low and sweet is their music, and behind it, dimly felt, is the inevitable, the unknown trouble which is coming.

I am sure this was a frequent mood of Scott's inner life. He did not openly speak of this deep-seated element in his temperament which coexisted, as is not uncommon, with a delightful ardour and joy in life, but it haunts his poetry. When it is vaguely, slightly felt, rising like a thin, golden, far-off mist of evening, it subdues the note of the poem, as in *County Guy*. Where it is more deeply felt and brings with it the dark menace of the tragedy of life, it brings forth lyrics like *Rosabelle*.

> Soft is the note and sad the lay
> That mourns the lovely Rosabelle.

This is, of its kind, a perfect ballad. As full of wild tragedy is *Where shall the lover rest*, Clare's song in *Marmion*. The coronach—*He is gone on the mountain*—is by its nature sad, but how excellent it is; everything in it is right. *The Maid of Neidpath* reaches without an effort, with the most natural ease and simplicity, a very depth of sorrow. These are good, but the dark jewel of them all is *Proud Maisie*, where the ancient Fate, which slew the Greek who was insolent to the gods and natural law, slays the proud maiden, but slays her not in the Greek, but in the full romantic, world. The snatches of song Madge Wildfire sings in the *Heart of Midlothian* are not far from the excellence of poor Ophelia's singing, and the *Ballad of the Harlaw* that Elspeth sings in the *Antiquary* is the finest reproduction of the spirit of the old ballads which exists in literature. They breathe the wildness of wild sorrow and of wild war. On the other hand, his ardent daring, eager joy, the strong delight of his temperament in open-air life, in the romance of war and hunting, of which, as he roamed the Border, his imagination made him a partaker, filled another class of his lyrics with rushing music, and often with an outlaw's passion. The martial brilliance and swiftness of *Bonny Dundee*, written, they say, in half an hour, cannot be bettered. We ride with the horsemen and gallop with the verse. We drink with the men, hear the shouting, and toss our bonnets in the air. *March, march, Ettrick and Teviotdale* echoes the irregular march of the men in the

trampling of the verse. The wild cry of the Highland clans, the gathering, the pipes, the lonely glens whence they came, the mountain moors over which they marched, are seen and heard, as if they were alive, in the *Pibroch o' Donuil Dhu* ; and the splendid way in which the ringing names are used in the verse—an excellence which runs through all the poems—gives it colour, resonance, and the full voice of war. The speed of the verse of *Young Lochinvar* is not less fit to the subject than the romantic daring and the gallant love which fill the poem as wine fills a cup. In the two songs of *Brignall Banks* and *A weary lot is thine, fair maid*, the spirit of the outlaw's life lives and breathes through the verse. In one its grim loneliness, its thought-overladen conscience, is represented ; in the other its inconstant thoughtlessness and reckless freedom. And both are deepened by the contrast of the innocent maidens whose youth sings unconsciously, before the outlaws, of peace and happy days. To create the right, the fitting atmosphere, is a great excellence, and Scott had this rare power when he was, in his lyrics, at his best. We cannot give a similar praise to the greater number of the lyrics. Some of them are strangely lifeless, others are expressed with a curious artificiality, some are plainly invented for the occasion and written with too little impulse or feeling. There is a pathless gulf between these and the others ; and it is only one proof the more of the artist nature in Scott, that when he was not writing naturally and from

a truly steadfast, or momentary, emotion, he wrote poorly.

Another element in Scott's poetry is a flitting fancy for the supernatural, which was nurtured in him by the wild legends of the Border. It appears in the great pleasure with which he collected the stories of the wild indwellers of the moor and the river, and the dark stories of the mountain glens where the pagan spirits still retained power over those who cherished evil thought.

It appears in the pleasure he evidently took in his imitations of those German ballads which deal with the supernatural, such as Bürger's *Lenore* and *Der Wilde Jäger*, and in the ballads he sent to Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*. They are well done, but he did the same kind of thing far better when he wrote ballads on stories of his native land. He only breathed easily the air of his own country. There is nothing, save in a few old Border ballads, more weird, more nobly supernatural, than *The Eve of St. John*; nothing more animated than *Cadyow Castle*; and *Glenfinlas* and the *Shepherd's Tale*, while less good, are not unworthy of their legends.

This element was still lively in his mind when he wrote the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. He handled it well enough in Deloraine's ride and the opening of the tomb of Michael Scott. But when it comes to the magic of the Lady and to the malicious pranks of the Goblin Dwarf, the result is failure, and Scott gave up the use of supernatural machinery till we find him trying it again in *Harold the Dauntless*, and

failing even more completely. Only in the *Bridal of Triermain* does he treat a magical story well. There are quaint failures in this poem. The four choirs of maidens in the four halls of the castle are a little chilling, like an unrelated ornament on a well-proportioned building, and are ill-fitted into the actual legend from another tale; but there is humanity enough in the poem to please and charm; and in spite of adverse criticism, I confess that I read it again and again with the sincerest pleasure. Even the rococo treatment of the Arthurian part of the subject gives me a certain pleasure, it is so plainly what it is. Moreover, Scott himself, in a certain side-mood of his various mind, is plainly to be felt in the treatment of the poem; and whatever he is or chooses to be, one is always in love with him when he is writing of what he loves.

It is because he did not care much for what he was writing that *The Lord of the Isles* is so inferior to *The Lady of the Lake* and its predecessors. He wrote it, as he said, to make money; he was quite bored by it; and he was writing *Rokeby*, *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, and a *Life of Swift* in the same year. It is scratchy, uninspired, and with a few exceptions, such as genius is sure to make, lifeless labour. His poetic vein was now worked out save for a few lyrics, and then he found himself in prose as he never had found himself in poetry. Few men, having exhausted one rich vein in their nature, find another richer still, and have the power to

work it. But this man was inexhaustible, a splendid gift of God to men.

The fame of Scott as a narrative poet rests on the three poems which preceded *Rokeby*. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is almost formless. It began as a ballad, and it never quite loses the spirit of the ballad. It is most like a congeries of ballads worked together into a continuous poem. But it makes up for this by its extraordinary vigour and by its romantic enchantment. It blew across the dull mist of England's materialism like a wind from the northern sea, and dispersed it for a time. It made men and women believe again in magic, and dwarfs, and the spirits of flood and fell, and romance; and above all in life lived frankly, boldly, on the edge of danger and delight—individual life, careless of wealth and comfort and death, careful only for honour and loyalty and love. The romantic past opened its gates, and the unromantic folk walked in, and were amazed to find themselves happy in the air of that strange country. The life of the Border, its wars, passions, temper, and faiths, grew into a seeming reality. It was curious and pleasant to read of the strife between the Scotts and the Beattisons for Eskdale, told as if by one who was present at the foray and the battle. Every one who read of the ride of Deloraine rode with him through the night and saw the light from the tomb of Michael Scott break gloriously up to the chancel roof of Melrose, and felt the spear of Cranstoun pierce his breast. Every one saw with his own eyes

the English host gather round Branksome Tower, and heard the Border slogan summon the clans. The poem is alive with war from end to end, and the life of free war entered into the hearts of its readers. And through it all, and making its charm, the spirit of Scott himself ran to and fro in delight, over the moors and rivers, the abbeys and castles, the gatherings, the camps, the tourneys, and the warlike feasts he loved so well.

Marmion, published in 1808, three years after the *Lay*, was, unlike it, conceived as a whole, and as carefully composed and shaped as Scott could manage. The characters illustrate one another fairly, but in themselves are not interesting. The incidents are no longer haphazard, and enliven or advance the tale; the hero's fictitious character is linked to a great historical event; there is plenty of variety and picturesque drawing, and the sequence and shape of the story are clear enough to satisfy the reader. It is true they might be clearer, and the work is often careless with the natural carelessness of Scott. The form of the poem is not then of the best, but the spirit of it is irresistible. Life runs through it like a river; and when we are in touch with its stirring life, we think but little of its defective form. Its great mistake is that the main character is a traitor to love and to honour for the sake of wealth—a forger and a betrayer; and though Scott tried hard to balance these sins by painting his bravery, his power to lead, his audacious pride, he could not save him for romance. He died like a hero, but

Douglas would not take his hand. This subtly taints the poem. His enemy Wilton is a mere ghost of a character. He does not count. The rest is excellent. There are few descriptions of nature, and none of her, as afterwards, for her own sake; but she is described as mingling her beauty with the works of man, with castle and convent, palace and camp. Such descriptions are of a delightful vividness, colour, detail, and sentiment. They change their atmosphere in accordance with their subject. The opening description of Norham in the sunset, and of Marmion's approach; that of the sea-voyage from Whitby to Lindisfarne; of the camp, of the war array of Scots and English by the Till before the battle closed thick and bloody on Flodden Field, are full of the brightest light, of fresh air and of vivid movement. We not only see the scene, we hear the dashing of the waves, and the horse hoofs on the bridge at Norham, and the trumpet's sounding, the soldiers' shouting in the camp, and the clash of battle. This is an excellent power in a poet—the craft of presentation. It was as good in the description of men, but on that I shall dwell in another part of this essay.

Marmion was followed by *The Lady of the Lake*, which, though I love the *Lay* the most, is the best composed, the most inventive, and most pleasing of the poems. It moves with ease from start to finish in a flowing narrative. The events follow without a jar from one to another and are naturally linked together. They take place in a narrow belt of

country and within a short time. The story is slight, but it is romantic throughout, and though some of the characters are historical, the poem is not worried by history.

Then it is pure invention from beginning to end —a little romantic adventure, pushed into historical times out of the world of the Chansons de Geste—a hunting, the hunter lost in an unknown country, a solitary island and a mountain maiden of a great house, her lovers and her bard—I need not follow the rest of the story. It is honest, clear invention, healthy expression of the outward world, and none of those subjective feelings which have no reproductive power injure its reality. The story is not one of the great stories, nor does it deal with the movements of the greater passions, nor is its action of high moment. Its level is only half-way up Parnassus. But it was a level on which Scott as a poet moved with a comfortable, productive pleasure, with facile execution. He had the liveliest feeling of the situations he created, and the power to express them happily. Then, too, the scenery in which he placed his story was that of his native land, and his love of Scotland is like a spirit of life in the poem. It is not brought into the same prominence as it is in *Marmion* or in the *Lay*, but it pervades the poem. Moreover the scenery is quite new, and the description of it awoke the greatest interest and excitement in its readers. Scott discovered the Trosachs and opened the Highlands to the pleasure of mankind in *The Lady of the Lake*. It was not

only the romantic tale, but also the revelation of an unknown world of wild beauty, which again sent a freshening wind into a dull society.

The characters in the poem are not worth much. The tale is more than the personages and absorbs them too much. None of them are as clearly defined and painted as the men in *Marmion*, but Ellen is more of a reality than Clare. Indeed, it is strange that he who in his novels drew characters so variously, so vitally, should in his poems draw them so weakly, and with so little variety. Their outward presentment, their dress, their air, all that the eye sees, is done with a splendid pencil, but what they were within is vague. The shell is there, but not the kernel. Scott felt this himself, and in *Rokeby* he deliberately set himself to make the portraiture of character the chief feature of the poem. He succeeded in this effort as ill in *Rokeby* as he succeeded in it magnificently in his novels. The characters of the poem are over-moralised, somewhat lifeless, and assuredly dull. They do not fit the time of the puritans and cavaliers in which Scott placed them; that is, they have no historical value. Their poetic value is not great enough to make one careless as to whether they are representative of the time in which they are placed. The natural descriptions, while accurate, are without freshness or inspiration. The moral tags with which they often end are distressing, and the preachments and the far-fetched illustrations that deviate so widely from the subject irritate the reader as much as

the general dulness of the story. The lyrics are dragged in.

On the whole, the quick pulse of life which runs through the previous poems, their fresh air and light, their dance of feeling and of metre, their swift incidents and vivid descriptions, are gone in *Rokeby*. No natural impulse starts it or goes with it. It was done with the purpose of paying for his house and plantations. The purpose necessarily injured the poetry and curdled his imagination. He elaborated its preparation, studied the natural scenery of it with so much care as to lose his first fresh impressions, and, most unfortunately, left in it his native land. These things took from the poem that vivacity, speed, and creative joy which had in its predecessors enchanted a sleepy public. I have often thought as I read them of young Lochinvar's ride.

> She is won! we are gone, over bank, bush, and scaur,
> They 'll have fleet steeds that follow, quoth young Lochinvar.

Nothing of that spirit is in *Rokeby*.

Lastly, we have no poetry of reflection in Scott. He was not even reflective of himself. There is no personal analysis of his soul, his moods, his woes, or his mental diseases. We never see or smell the lazar-house. The poems are full of the spirit of Scott, but not of descriptions of himself. They are as impersonal, save in one or two instances, as nature herself. Even in the introductions to the several cantos of *Marmion*, where he does speak

of himself, it is such self-speaking as may occur in letters to friends, which these introductions purport to be. They are not self-revelation so much as recalling to his friend the happy memories of their youthful past. The rarity of such personal memories is one of the charms of these poems. We may wish for more of this personal element, but, on the whole, his impersonality in poetry is too great a blessing to be lost in a world which is so overwhelmingly personal in poetry. When we are weary of philosophy in verse, of representations of exhausted moods, of the weariness of life in men who imagine they have lived, of what some poets call truth and is disease, of sordid society embodied in flamboyant verse, of jangled rhymes for the sake of clever rhyme, of strange rhythms, of word-painting as if sound and pattern of words were poetry, it is a great comfort to turn to Walter Scott and find oneself in a world of poetry where the verse is simple, straightforward, clear, sweet, and abiding in romance. I am sorry for those who cannot share in this consolation.

III

In the first part of this essay I have tried to show how the poetry of Scott was related to the ideas of the Revolution. In this last part I should like, if possible, to explain how it is related to the previous Scottish poetry. In doing this certain elements of

his poetry will appear on which I have not yet touched.

There is a distinct race difference in the poetry written in the English tongue by men inhabiting the Lowlands of Scotland from that written in England itself; and the difference consists in this—that in the Lowlands Celtic blood was equally mixed with English blood, whereas over a great part of England such an admixture was very unequal. It is true that in Devonshire, and along the borders of our Wales, the Welsh mingled with the English, but, even there, not to the same extent as in the Lowlands. In our Yorkshire and our Northumberland there was also a Celtic admixture, but again, not to a similar extent with the Lowlands. On the south of the Border the Teutonic element finally predominated, and absorbed, almost altogether, the Celtic. But on the north of the Border, in the Lowlands, it was quite a different story. The western half of the Lowlands—part of the kingdom of Strathclyde which was unconquered by the English—was entirely Celtic, with the exception of Galloway. The eastern half—part of the old kingdom of Northumbria—from the Border to the river Forth was English. After a time the Scot kings of the west overran the eastern Lowlands, and reduced the English inhabitants under their sway. They did not slaughter or enslave the English, but amalgamated them with their own subjects. The two races, then, mingled on an equality over all the Lowlands, intermarried easily, and their various

race qualities were combined for centuries. This mingling of race has influenced all Lowland Scottish history and all Lowland Scottish poetry, that is, poetry written south of the Forth and Clyde in the English tongue. We have, then, to remember that in this space of land between the Border and the two rivers of the Clyde and the Forth there was a condition of things which existed nowhere else in Britain. In England the direct Celtic influence disappears from literature. Indirectly, through the Normans, it had a great influence in the story of Arthur. But it was not direct; it came clothed not in Celtic garments, but in the trappings of French romance. In the Lowlands, where the Celt and the Teuton were for centuries harmoniously mixed together, certain Celtic elements, long untouched by French romance, acted directly on literature when it began north of the Border, and coloured the English poetry written in the Lowlands from its origin right down to the present day. In Chaucer, these elements derived from the Celtic race have completely disappeared. In James the First of Scotland they clearly exist, even though he was an imitator of Chaucer. In the Lowland poets, though Chaucer's influence was also great with them, they continue to exist. In Henderson, in Dunbar, in Gawain Douglas, in Fergusson, and in Burns, they are prominent. They are just as strongly marked in Walter Scott.

The first of these Celtic elements is the love of nature for its own sake. In the early poems of

Ireland, in the Gaelic poems of Scotland and in those of Wales, there is a close, imaginative, emotional observation and description of natural beauty, especially of wild nature, which is also found in the English poetry of the Lowlands, but not in English poetry proper till the nineteenth century. The poet loves to be alone with nature without even his sweetheart. Quite content with the beauty and joy he feels, he is ravished into description, not of his own feelings, but of the things before his eyes. They are enough, and if he can describe them well, others will be lured to the same solitude with nature and into the same delight. But we may say—This also is to be found in English poetry! Yes, but in English poetry of the nineteenth century. The point is that it can scarcely be said to exist in the Early English poetry after the Conquest,[1] and that at the time, for example, of Henry VII. and Henry VIII., when there was not a trace in England of it, it was in full flower in Scotland.

In Chaucer's time there was no description of wild nature, of mountain or forest country, no love of it. On the contrary, Chaucer would have been exceedingly put out, even terrified, if he found himself among mountains or in a savage moorland. What he loved was a trim garden with beds of roses and pebbled pathways, or a wood

[1] An exception may be made in the case of Layamon's *Brut*, and the *Grene Knight*, where some fine natural description may be found; but Layamon, on the border of Wales, was closely subject to Celtic influence, and so was the writer of the *Grene Knight*, who belonged to Lancashire.

where the trees were planted at proper distances among shaven grass. His landscape was, on the whole, the conventional French landscape, and this was the only kind of nature English poets cared for up to the time of Elizabeth. But in Scotland it was quite different. Even in the *King's Quair*—the work of James I.—though the poem imitates Chaucer, the landscape has touches of wildness and is loved for its own sake; and in the later poets—Henderson, Douglas, Dunbar—the whole scenery of spring, of summer, of winter, the woodland, the rushing brooks, the wild rocks, the mountain glens, the wind among them in its storm, the aspects of the sky—are described with an accuracy, a study, a minute love which at their time was unknown, nay, was impossible in England; and which, in its fullness, though it began with James Thomson who brought it from Scotland, we do not find in English poetry, in its absolute ignoring of humanity, until two hundred years after, till Wordsworth began to write. There is, of course, fine natural description in the Elizabethan poetry down to Milton; in Herrick and his comrades, in Gray and Collins, but it is not a poetry for the sake of nature alone; it is of nature as a background for humanity, as a mirror reflecting human feeling, an image or illustration of human life. But in the Lowland poetry, as it frequently is in Wordsworth and our own poets, it is of nature alone for her own sake, apart from men.

This is the strange thing we have to account for, and I hold that it is due to the long, unbroken

admixture of Celtic blood in the Lowland people. Moreover, the description is of a particular kind. What is seen and recorded is seen in itself as it is. The exact scene is so closely given that it reads too much like a catalogue. It wants the spiritual element of the universal Divine that Wordsworth or Coleridge would have added to it. The descriptions by Gawain Douglas of summer and winter landscape are minute and loving, but they do not introduce man, they are of nature for her own sake. They might have been written by James Thomson, and yet their date is at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

This is the kind of description of nature which we find in Walter Scott. His descriptions are close to the general aspect of the scene, accurate as far as they go, even minute. Humanity does not intrude upon them. They have no spiritual element. They are clear statements of natural fact. That which makes them delightful is that their lucid vision of the beautiful things the poet has the heart to see reveals his love of them, and of the wild loneliness in which they live. But this natural, unmeditative love is all. Nature to him is not, apart from her forms, in any sense alive. A cloud is a cloud, a stream a stream, a rock a rock. They have no soul, no voice, no consciousness of joy, as they would have to Wordsworth. If he speak of sorrow, or peace, or pleasure in connection with these natural objects, the sorrow, peace, and pleasure are his own, he never thinks that nature has brought

them to him or that nature shares in them. He always feels himself distinct from nature. In this apartness, in this love of nature without the sense of any vital kinship with her, he stands alone among the poets of the nineteenth century ; but he is not alone in Scotland. This is the way nature is regarded by the Lowland poets from the sixteenth century down to Burns. Scott does not differ from the rest. In his admiration, in his description of nature, and in the manner of it he was the child of a long ancestry.

Nor is there any moralising of nature. Scott could not have made, like Wordsworth, the daisy image the loveliness of humility and unself-consciousness, nor could he have flung a garland of fifty human fancies round the flower. He could not, like Wordsworth, have filled the grove of yews at Borrowdale with the tragic powers of human life, with mighty primæval forms like Time the Skeleton and Death the Shadow, and made them recline in the deep umbrage and listen to the mountain flood. He would only have said that the daisy was yellow and white, and shone like a star in the grass. He would only have said the yews were dismal and swarthy, and that no flowers grew in their baleful shade.[1] It is possible to feel that such direct de-

[1] But here, 'twixt rock and river, grew
A dismal grove of sable yew,
With whose sad tints were mingled seen
The blighted fir's sepulchral green.
Seemed that the trees their shadows cast,
The earth that nourished them to blast ;

scription is nearest to nature, and is the healthiest way to look at her, but it does not suit us so well as that of Wordsworth or Shelley; because, being troubled or pleased by philosophy or self-communing when we live with nature, we want the poets to sympathise with us. Scott will not do this. The only thing he does is at the end of his description to tag on a moral or fanciful touch, like a piece of gold lace on a garment without which the garment would look all the better. Here is one:

> Foxglove and nightshade side by side,
> Emblems of punishment and pride.

Here is another:

> Who loves not more the night of June
> Than dull December's gloomy noon?
> The moonlight than the fog of frost?
> And can we say, which cheats the most?

This is pure commonplace.

The conventionality of these moralities extended itself to his descriptions of nature. He uses a number of unimpassioned phrases, of careless adjectives. It seems sometimes as if anything would do. This habit grew upon him, and is more marked in

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> For never knew that swarthy grove
> The verdant hue that fairies love;
> Nor wilding green, nor woodland flower,
> Arose within its baleful bower;
> The dank and sable earth receives
> Its only carpet from the leaves,
> That, from the withering branches cast,
> Bestrewed the ground with every blast.

Rokeby than in any other of the poems. I even think that his love of nature itself was affected by this artificial phrasing, and that his early passion for her beauty did not return until he wrote of nature in his novels. It is in the early poems, and when he writes of how he felt in youth, that the conventional note is not heard, that his verse reflects the natural joy of his soul in the beauty of the world. We lie with him and his friend on the hillside and hear his heart beat.

> The laverock whistled from the cloud,
> The stream was lively, but not loud.
> From the white thorn the May-flower shed
> Its dewy fragrance round our head.
> Not Ariel lived more merrily
> Under the blossomed bough than we.

But even then it needed to make him perfectly happy that he should have a memory of some far-off day, a touch of chivalric romance to add to nature. It was love of her, no doubt, but it was not love of her alone. He felt the Celtic influence, but not alone.

Another Celtic element in his poetry was his love of colour. I need scarcely dwell on that, for Ruskin has drawn full attention to it. He quotes, in proof of his opinion, the fine description of Edinburgh in *Marmion* beginning

> Still on the spot Lord Marmion stayed,

in which the whole scene is painted in accordant colours. And he gives many more examples. This

special love of colour is keen in the Celtic race. In all Irish and Welsh poems, many of which were composed long before the English had emerged from the Saxon forests, there is an extraordinary love of colour. The landscape is described in its hues rather than in its outlines. The birds, the insects, the animals, are chiefly drawn in colour. Minute and delicate shades of colour are determined, even to the different tints of a mountain when the wind is passing over it, or of the sea when the tide is coming in. The heroes who fight or march are always in a blaze of colour; and every part of their dress is described by its colour more than by its stuff. As we read, the page flashes before our eyes. The colour is often intemperately used, but even in its intemperate use we feel how much it was loved by the writer.

This rich, plenteous colour is rarely to be found in the proper English poets after Chaucer up to this century. But in the Lowland poetry of Scotland the love of it is very great. Men like Dunbar, Douglas, even Lyndsay,—and I only name the foremost,—in describing nature and men, describe them like the Celts with a profusion of colour. At a time when, in Surrey, Wyatt, or later in Spenser and Shakespeare, colour is rarely dwelt on, the pages of the Scottish poets are like an heraldic shield, like nature herself in Italy, and not in the cold north.

This is the Celtic colour passing down in the Lowlands through the centuries, and living again

in Scott. It is as fully shown in his description of the personal appearance of men as Ruskin found it in his description of nature. Here is the description of *Marmion* :

> Well was he armed from head to heel,
> In mail and plate of Milan steel;
> But his strong helm, of mighty cost,
> Was all with burnished gold embossed;
> Amid the plumage of the crest,
> A falcon hovered on her nest,
> With wings outspread, and forward breast;
> E'en such a falcon, on his shield,
> Soared sable in an azure field:
> The golden legend bore aright,
> 'Who checks at me, to death is dight.'
> Blue was the charger's broidered rein;
> Blue ribbons decked his arching mane;
> The knightly housing's ample fold
> Was velvet blue, and trapped with gold.

The other Celtic element, the third which came down to the Lowland poets, and does not appear in the same kind in English poetry, is a certain abusive, roaring, exaggerated wit—well represented in Dunbar—indulged in with often as much intemperance as colour was indulged in, but frequently used with as much excellence—especially by Burns—as the poets used colour. This element we do not find in the poetry of Scott, but we do find, here and there, the other side of it, that into which the rollicking laughter of the Celt glides at a touch—pathetic passionateness. And of this there are two forms, the pathos of extreme tenderness for quiet sorrow, and the greater pathos which comes from

feeling at rare moments the sense of the weird which overhangs the world, which especially overshadows—as in Greek tragedy—the pridefulness of youth forgetful of the gods.

Of the first in Scott there is no better example than the *Maid of Neidpath* :

O lovers' eyes are sharp to see,
And lovers' ears in hearing;
And love, in life's extremity,
Can lend an hour of cheering.
Disease had been in Mary's bower,
And slow decay from mourning,
Though now she sits on Neidpath's tower
To watch her love's returning.

All sunk and dim her eyes so bright,
Her form decayed by pining,
Till through her wasted hand, at night,
You saw the taper shining;
By fits a sultry hectic hue
Across her cheek was flying;
By fits, so ashy pale she grew,
Her maidens thought her dying.

Yet keenest powers to see and hear
Seemed in her frame residing;
Before the watchdog prick'd his ear
She heard her lover's riding;
Ere scarce a distant form was ken'd,
She knew, and waved to greet him;
And o'er the battlement did bend,
As on the wing to meet him.

He came—he pass'd—an heedless gaze,
As o'er some stranger glancing;
Her welcome, spoke in faltering phrase,
Lost in his courser's prancing—

The castle arch, whose hollow tone
Returns each whisper spoken,
Could scarcely catch the feeble moan,
Which told her heart was broken.

Of the second there is none finer anywhere, in a lyrical form, than the little half-ballad, half-lyric, of *Proud Maisie* :

Proud Maisie is in the wood,
Walking so early;
Sweet Robin sits on the bush,
Singing so rarely.

'Tell me, thou bonny bird,
When shall I marry me?'—
'When six braw gentlemen
Kirkward shall carry ye.'

'Who makes the bridal bed,
Birdie, say truly?'
'The grey-headed sexton
That delves the grave duly.

'The glow-worm o'er grave and stone
Shall light thee steady;
The owl from the steeple sing,
"Welcome, proud lady."'

That has the highest excellence, and another short song in the same novel—the *Heart of Midlothian*—approaches its tragic music, 'Cauld is my bed, Lord Archibald!' In a different form, but grim with his transient, but not unfrequent, view of life, is the little song in the most fateful of all Scott's stories, the *Bride of Lammermoor*. 'Look not thou on beauty's charming,' it begins, 'do nothing in the whole world which will bring the envy of the gods

upon you, if you would live at ease and die in peace.'

> Look not thou on beauty's charming,—
> Sit thou still when kings are arming,—
> Taste not when the wine-cup glistens,—
> Speak not when the people listens,—
> Stop thine ear against the singer,—
> From the red gold keep thy finger,—
> Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
> Easy live and quiet die.

But to live at ease and die in peace was not Scott's desire. His mounting spirit scorned fameless, indolent, and luxurious days. All his poetry rings with martial endeavour, constancy in pursuit of lofty ends, contempt of apathy, love of romance.

> Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name.

So much for the Celtic elements, and their appearance in the poetry of Scott.

There were, moreover, two other elements, which arose out of the history of Scotland, in the Lowland poetry. The first of these is the love of distinct individualities, the pleasure the poets had in men who lived their own free independent life, and fought for their own hand. It was a love which gave them a great power of drawing distinct types of men. The second is the intense and assertive nationality of the poets. Both these, after a career of four centuries, are vital in the poems of Walter Scott, and connect him historically with all his predecessors.

With regard to the first, that is, the special individual element, it arose out of the political state of the country. The great barons were not brought so decidedly under the monarch as they were in England. They often fought for their own hand against the crown. Like independent chieftains, they went to war with one another. They lived their own life in the midst of their own people. Nor did this belong only to the higher ranks. Every little border chieftain, almost every border farmer was, or felt himself to be, his own master, and fought for his own interest alone. There was no welding together, or but little, of village to village, of county to county, of the whole nation into one corporate body in which men might learn to suppress their individual wills for the interest of the whole. Even when this came to be done, there was always close beside them, in the Highlands, a great extent of country in which individualism ran riot, in which every clan boasted itself of its distinctness, in which every head of a clan was like a little monarch. The example of this, the influence of it, long ministered to the Lowland lovers of individuality in political life ; and on the Border, where war was always going on with England, the habit of independent individualism lasted till very late in the history of Scotland.

This is clearly seen all through Scottish poetry from the year 1370 to this century, and Scott was one of his race in this. He loved with all his heart this free, original, individual life. He found in it all the elements of the romance he

loved. The first thing he published was a collection and expansion of the Border ballads, in which the personal passions, personal wars, personal legends of men and women who lived alone in single towers and on their own piece of land were recorded.

> By the sword they won their land,
> And by the sword they hold it still.

One of the most vigorous pieces of poetry in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is the account of how the Scotts won Eskdale from the Beattisons, and it records a state of things in which individual war and passion are unchecked.

It follows from this that Scott would have a special delight in drawing clearly outlined types of men, of all kinds from the king to the peasant. We know from his novels how vital was his power of individualising. There is nowhere, save in Chaucer and Shakespeare, such a gallery of vivid portraits of men and women as we have in the work of Walter Scott. His pencil lives along each line he wrote when he described a personality.

This power is not less vivid in his poetry. It is not, of course, a power which is confined to Scottish poets. All the greatest poets possess it. But it came easily, owing to the conditions of Scottish life, to the poets of Scotland, and its excellence in the work of Scott places him, in that matter, if in that alone, along with the greater poets. It is not only that the men are drawn vividly. The men are also types, and the types are as varied as they are

clear. Sir William of Deloraine, Roderick Dhu, the Lord of Harden, Sir David Lyndsay, Marmion, the Douglas in *Marmion*, the Douglas in the *Lady of the Lake*, James IV., stand forth so clear that we should know them if we met them now on a Border moor. Nor is his outline less luminous when he treats of the Border farmer, of the small chieftain, of the archer, and the Highland vassal. Who that has read it has forgotten the description of Wat Tinlinn and his folk?

> Whiles thus he spoke, the bold yeoman
> Entered the echoing barbican.
> He led a small and shaggy nag
> That through a bog from hag to hag
> Could bound like any Billhope stag.
> It bore his wife and children twain;
> A half-clothed serf was all their train;
> His wife, stout, ruddy, and dark-brow'd,
> Of silver brooch and bracelet proud,
> Laughed to her friends among the crowd.
> He was of stature passing tall,
> But sparely formed, and lean withal;
> A battered morion on his brow;
> A leather jack, as fence enow,
> On his broad shoulders loosely hung;
> A Border axe behind was slung;
> His spear, six Scottish ells in length,
> Seemed newly dyed in gore,
> His shafts and bow, of wondrous strength,
> His hardy partner bore.

The man stands alive before us. This is the individualising power of Scott, and for further proof of it we may read the description in *Marmion*,

canto v., of the camp of James IV., when Marmion and Fitz-Eustace ride into it. There Scott sketches with his romantic, clear, and lively pencil the great noble, the chivalric knight, the bold and youthful squire, the stern burgher, the yeoman, the Borderer, and the Highlander, all together; and yet so fiercely individual are they, each and all, that it is with difficulty peace is kept within the camp.

The second of these historical elements in which Scott shares, and which connect him with all the previous poets of Scotland, is his resolute nationality. The English were as national as the Scots, and felt as keen a patriotism. But they had no need to assert it specially; no one was trying to suppress their national existence. On the other hand, for many years, Scotland had to fight tooth and nail against the efforts of England to overthrow her national life. This, and the wars for freedom, left their traces in all her poetry from James I., who had been a captive in England shortly after the death of Chaucer; from Barbour, who wrote the deeds of the Bruce before the death of Chaucer; down to Fergusson and Burns. Scotland, her liberty, her heroes, her nationality, are thrust forward, almost obtrusively, by every poet. This appears, even more remarkably, in their natural description. In the early poets the conventional form of beginning a poem, borrowed from Chaucer, is used from the time of James I. to Sir David Lyndsay in all the more important poems. There is a dream, a May morning, or a winter day; but the point is this,

that the traditionary landscape is departed from, and a Scottish landscape introduced, which is described with accuracy, and with the poet's eye upon the subject. The Scottish poets became original observers of nature through the force of their national feeling. Every one knows how vivid the Scottish landscape is in Burns, how he loves it, and how passionately he speaks of his native land. And this element is no less vigorous in Walter Scott, no less determined, no less—I had almost said—obtrusive. His poems of other countries have no salt in them, no fire. When he wrote cavalier songs, the only one worth a chaplet is *Bonny Dundee*. *Rokeby*, even, though it belongs to the Border, is cold in comparison to the three Scottish poems which preceded it. It is the natural description of his native land, and of her fight for freedom, which redeems the heaviness of the story of the *Lord of the Isles*. The finest thing in *Marmion* is the description of the last, stern, desperate struggle of king and noble, burgher and peasant at Flodden Field, where, till night fell on the fight,

> The stubborn spearmen still made good
> The dark impenetrable wood

against the English foe.

The men he loves most are those the tale of whose life is steeped in loyalty to Scotland. The places he loves most are those round which has gathered the history of the Scottish chiefs, their wars, their piping, their loves, their woes, their castles, their

exile life in moor and cave and forest. The scenery he loves most and describes the best is the scenery of the Border, the wind of whose hills blows freshly through his verse, and of the Highland country close to the Lowland frontier, where every step has its ancestral story. For the Highlands themselves he does not care so much, for they are not so close to the theatre of the national war. The piece of country outside the Border he most delights in is the piece round Stirling and Edinburgh. Edinburgh itself, the centre of his land, is passionately loved and described. 'Mine own romantic town,' he cries in *Marmion*, and Lyndsay smiled, nor did Marmion frown when Fitz-Eustace's heart, enraptured at the beauty of the scene from Blackford Hill, broke out :

> O, where 's the coward that would not dare
> To fight for such a land.

The most passionate outburst in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is the address to his country and its scenery :

> Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land!
> Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
> As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
> From wandering on a foreign strand!
> If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
> For him no minstrel raptures swell;
> High though his titles, proud his name,
> Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;

Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.
O Caledonia! stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of my sires! what mortal hand
Can e'er untie the filial band,
That knits me to thy rugged strand!
Still, as I view each well-known scene,
Think what is now, and what hath been,
Seems as, to me, of all bereft,
Sole friends thy woods and streams were left;
And thus I love them better still,
Even in extremity of ill.
By Yarrow's stream still let me stray,
Though none should guide my feeble way;
Still feel the breeze down Ettrick break,
Although it chill my withered cheek;
Still lay my head by Teviot Stone,
Though there, forgotten and alone,
The Bard may draw his parting groan.

We listen to the very heart of Scott; the life-blood of his poetry flows in it. He never lost that passion. It ceased to be joyous, it became full of sadness. The noble, but desperate struggle of his later years, the noblest effort recorded, I think, in English literature, of an enduring, strong, and faithful battle with misfortune, a battle which, while he conquered in it, killed him—made his love of country sorrowful, but did not lessen its intensity.

His youthful summer 'danced by on wings of game and glee.' The dark 'storm reserved its rage'

> Against the winter of his age,

but in the storm of winter age, as in the summer of youth, he was always the impassioned patriot.

When he was smitten with paralysis in 1830-1, he was sent to the Mediterranean to recover strength; but

> Nature's loveliest looks,
> Art's noblest relics, history's rich bequests,
> Failed to reanimate, and but feebly cheered,
> The whole world's Darling.

The news of Goethe's death was brought him. 'He, at least, died at home,' said Scott, 'let us to Abbotsford.' They carried him through London across England to Scotland. He lay all but lifeless in his carriage, as he drew near to the scenes he loved so well. 'As we descended' says Lockhart 'the vale of Gala, he began to gaze about him, and by degrees it was obvious that he was recognising the features of that familiar landscape. Presently he murmured a name or two—"Gala water, surely, Buckholm, Torwoodlee." As we rounded the hill and the outline of the Eildons burst upon him he became greatly excited; and when, turning himself on his couch, his eye caught at length his own towers, at the distance of a mile, he sprang up with a cry of delight.'

And there, on a lovely day, 'so perfectly still that the sound of all others most delicious to his ears, the gentle ripple of the Tweed over its pebbles, was distinctly audible as we knelt around the bed, his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes.'

INAUGURAL ADDRESS TO THE SHELLEY SOCIETY, Wednesday, March 10, 1886, at University College, London.

It has been asked, 'Why have a Shelley Society? Those who care for him will read him without the impulse of such a Society, nor will they enjoy him the more, but the less perhaps, when they hear what the critics have to say about him.' The question has a good deal of weight, but the answer is that it 'is our humour' to have the Society, and that four hundred persons have also said, 'It is my humour,'—and an excellent reason it is for any literary society whatever. But we are also interested in collecting all that has been said about Shelley in the past, not for the purpose of helping us to love his poetry more, but for the sake of entertaining ourselves with the contrast between the opinions of critics concerning a true poet when he is alive, and the view taken of him by the world when he has been dead for sixty years. Shelley is one of the most striking instances in our time of the way in which an artist, ignored or abused in his own day, rises from the grave into which the critics have trampled him, and, when their noxious names have

perished, lives as a power in the hearts of men. This kind of thing fits our humour, both when we are a little spiteful with the analytic tribe, and also when we wish to cherish our own appreciation of Shelley.

Then, again, it pleases us to have facsimiles of the first editions of Shelley, and other bibliographical curiosities. I do not say that this is a very high ambition, nor that it has anything to do with love of poetry; yet it is a harmless and innocent fancy, and just as good as the little fancies other folk may have about great men for whom they care. A lover likes everything that puts him in mind of his mistress, even a picture of the room she dwelt in, and we may like to see how Shelley clothed his books. For in this case there is a distinct interest. Shelley looked after the 'get-up' of many of his poems and pamphlets himself, above all, those that were printed in Italy, and we seem to touch his personality in these examples.

Moreover, there is another reason for our Society. There are persons, most of whom already belong to us, who have made Shelley, his life and poetry, a special study. Many things continually occur to them which may be worth saying briefly, but which would scarcely form enough material for a public paper. In this Society these persons will find room to air their theories and criticisms; and some of them will be interesting hereafter. Once more, as another biography of Shelley will soon be published, several new questions will be before us, and we shall

all be interested to hear, through this Society, the discussion of these questions.

After all has been said, however, these reasons for this Society run up into the first—'It is our humour.' We are lovers of Shelley, and we like to bring together into one body a number of persons who will not only make him a lonely pleasure, but will combine to read, study, and talk about him with one another.

Secondly, the question, 'Why should we have a Shelley Society?' brings us face to face with those persons who, while they really care for poetry, do not care for Shelley's poetry. I can imagine Mr. Matthew Arnold, who is such a person, being even distressed in mind, or perhaps contemptuous, when he hears of this Society. He has discovered, after he has divested his mind of the personal charm of Shelley, 'the incurable want in his poetry of a sound subject-matter, and the incurable fault, in consequence, of unsubstantiality'; and I fear lest he should extend this accusation to us in general. He will tell us we are about to study the unsubstantial, and that no good can come of it. He will advise us to turn to Wordsworth—there is a poet who has laid hold of the poet's right subject-matter. Again he cries, Turn to Byron—there is a poet, selections from whom will make up a volume which for real substance, power, and worth, will far overweigh a volume from Shelley.

Well, with regard to Byron, I am quite willing to say that he is at present underrated and that Arnold's attempt to place him in a higher position is a just

thing to do. But why could he not leave Shelley alone? why weaken his praise of Byron by a dispraise of Shelley, which proves that he has lost the power he once had of distinguishing what was best in imagination, in art, and in melody? Even now, I should like to appeal from Mr. Arnold the critic to Mr. Arnold the poet; but it would be no use, for he actually maintains that selections from Byron are more interesting and more valuable than any selections from Shelley. It is a very fantastic assertion on his lips, and the books, I venture to say, prove that he is wrong. Byron does not shine in selections, Shelley does; nor, indeed, can Byron compare with Shelley in what Mr. Arnold would call 'truth, seriousness of substance and matter, felicity of diction and manner.' Felicity of diction and manner! That is the most amusing of the comparisons.

Byron was rarely true to himself in his poetry; no, not altogether, I believe, in *Don Juan*, at least, not in the closing cantos. Indeed, I doubt whether, during a good portion of his life, until he was weary of vanity and acting, he had any self to which to be true, so much had he overlaid his own personality with another which he dressed up for the world. It is this falsehood, or rather fiction, in his work which will always prevent men and women from loving it as well as they love Shelley, who is always true to himself. Goethe, who praised Byron's work, mistook the unreal for the real man, because the unreal was done with so much

power, and because he read Byron in a foreign tongue. A great deal too much has been made of the great German's praise (which indeed he carefully modified), without any thought of how changed his view would have become had he been able to recognise that the whole sentiment of Byron's earlier work was not true. *Werther* was ten times more true to Goethe than *Manfred* was to Byron.

Shelley was not so blinded in this matter—and I may as well interpolate here what Shelley thought of Byron, remembering always how unenvious and how frank Shelley's judgment was. It has been said by Mr. Arnold 'that Shelley knew well the difference between the achievement of such a poet as Byron and his own. He praises Byron too unreservedly, but he sincerely felt, and he was right in feeling, that Byron was a greater poetical power than himself.' One would think from this that Shelley had praised all Byron's work, and that he had never felt the weakness of Byron in poetry. He does say with regard to one of the cantos of *Don Juan*, that it sets Byron not only above, but far above, all the poets of the day—every word is stamped with immortality. 'I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may.'—He does say with regard to *Cain* 'that it is the finest thing any poet has produced in England since *Paradise Regained*'—a phrase which proves Shelley's friendship for Byron, or his pleasure in an attack on orthodox religion, more than his critical acumen. But that, with the exception of a fragment

and a sonnet among the poems which depreciate himself and exalt Byron, is nearly all; and it is a small foundation on which to build so large and so confident an assertion as that which Mr. Arnold makes. The fact is, that Shelley had no such unreserved an opinion about Lord Byron's work, and sometimes contrasted it (but only to his friends) with his own. 'If *Marino Faliero* is a drama,' he says, 'then *The Cenci* is not.' He differed also, and as much as possible, from Byron about poetry. He declared that 'Byron patronised a system of criticism only fit for the production of mediocrity, and though all his fine poems have been produced in defiance of this system, yet I recognise the pernicious effects of it in the *Doge of Venice*.' He is indignant with the spirit—the want of truth, the tone of mind, which animates certain cantos of *Childe Harold*. 'It is a spirit, which, if insane, is the most wicked and mischievous insanity: an obstinate and self-willed folly in which he hardens himself. Lord Byron is heartily and deeply discontented with himself, and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and the destiny of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair?' At least Shelley did not think that Byron had 'seriousness of subject or matter'—and as to Shelley's poetical judgment on *Childe Harold*, this phrase which follows does not prove that he was unreserved in his praise. It is almost contemptuous. 'But that he is a great poet I think his address to Ocean proves.' He had a

sincere, even an enthusiastic admiration for Byron's power; with his characteristic modesty he placed his work below Byron's; but there were hours when he felt quite differently, and knew, like Wordsworth, that if Byron was among the immortals, so was he. Moreover, he felt, and felt strongly, that Byron had not the qualities which make a poet always great. What those qualities are he has himself laid down. For he asks concerning Ariosto—'Where is the gentle seriousness, the delicate sensibility, the calm and sustained energy, without which true greatness cannot be?' These were not qualities he saw in Byron; nor had he the slightest sympathy with his friend's desire to attract to himself the wonder or the admiration of the world. This element in Byron's poetry was incomprehensible by Shelley, who, though he desired to live in men's hearts, was wholly without care for the applause of the world. Here is a phrase from one of his letters:

'I am fully repaid for the painful emotions from which some verses of my poem sprung, by your sympathy and approbation—which is all the reward I expect—and as much as I desire. It is not for me to judge whether, in the high praise your feelings assign me, you are right or wrong. The poet and the man are two different natures; though they exist together, they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding on each other's powers and efforts by any reflex act. The decision of the cause, whether or no I am a poet, is removed

from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble ; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be, "Guilty—death!"'

The fact is that Shelley did care for truth, and was always true to himself. Whether he was the poet with high hopes for man, or the poet who describes himself—it is always Shelley that we see and feel in his poetry, not a man made up in any way for presentation to the world. We are in contact with a clear individuality, as we are with Wordsworth ; and this makes Shelley vitally interesting to all those who have anything, naturally, of his temper, or who at certain times of their lives pass through the supersensuous realm in which he lived. It is by no means a common temper, and because of its want of touch with daily life, with simple sorrows and pleasures, I never claim for Shelley a position equal with Wordsworth when I compare the whole of the one poet's work with that of the other ; but the temper of Shelley is a real human temper, and it is the same, with the subtle changes wrought by the years, in its twofold manifestation—social and personal—from the beginning to the end. This truthfulness to his own nature is plain enough in the longer poems. It is as plain in the lyrics ; every lyric is an outburst of himself, of what he felt passionately for others or for himself.

As to the lyrics themselves, who can compare them to Byron's ? Take all Byron's lyrics together —will they outweigh three or four of Shelley's?

Take the *Cain* which Shelley thought so great; will it stand comparison with the *Prometheus Unbound?* I do not mean only in poetical quality of verse, or in imaginative conception—but in gravity of thought, in freedom from self-consideration, in serious attempt, founded on serious thinking, to grasp the problem of evil and of good.

The same kind of truthfulness extended to Shelley's drawing of natural scenery. Byron, even in his best descriptions, introduces lines which show us that he was not lost in love of that which he described, metaphors which are so far-fetched that we know he was working, if I may so express it, in the studio, and not from nature herself; sudden screams of his own personality; false notes which take us away from the object, and which have nothing to do with it. A metaphor like that contained in these lines:

> O night, and storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,
> And lovely in your loveliness, as is the light
> Of a dark eye in woman;

or this—when he is dwelling on the rainbow which arches over the cataract of Velino:

> Resembling, 'mid the torture of the scene,
> Love watching madness with unalterable mien—

are not to be found, nor anything resembling their far-fetched untruthfulness, from end to end of Shelley—not even when he is most victimised by his own intemperance of imagination. At his very

worst, even when he is most redundant, he is true to nature. At his best, he is involved in nature, and describes what he sees of her with the closest accuracy to the general and changing impression of the scene. Like Turner, he painted his impressions, but the impressions are true to things as they are. I challenge the descriptive poetry of this century in England to surpass in accuracy of observation, and in composition of an imaginative whole, the description which occurs in the *Prometheus* of the great Alpine valley seen at dawn from the heights above it. In splendour and in truth it stands clear in the poetry which describes sublime and vast nature ; and the way in which it closes, with a comparison which binds up the whole scene with human history, and which fits like a glove to the matter described and to the subject of the poem, may well be compared with such paltry analogies as Byron's of the rainbow to love and the cataract to madness.

As to truth to human nature—I have elsewhere said that when Shelley wrote about himself, he often described a certain vague, sceptical, discontented, aspiring or depressed condition of human life which has a great interest for us at the present time, because so many of us share in it, and among these some of his critics. But it is a condition of which he himself strongly disapproves. The preface to *Alastor* is enough to allege as evidence of this disapproval. He wrote that poem in order to get rid, as far as possible, of this condition, and so far the matter of the poem was serious. The only cure for

it in the poem was death; and Shelley was never cured of its recurrent attacks until he died.

Another set of his poems, those which belong to love, to regrets, to metaphysical passion, cannot be said to be serious in substance. They are woven of ether and fine fire, but nevertheless they are true to human nature, to many passing phases of feeling, and no one else has embodied these remote and subtle phases. Our life is not all passed in the realm of realities, of simple sorrows and joys. We are often such stuff as dreams are made of, and we suffer and rejoice as much in our illusions—if they are not often the truest things in life—as in that which we call real life. If, however, all Shelley's poetry consisted of this soft-spun cloudland, of this ethereal quintessence of delicate imaginings, we might fairly blame him; but it did not. We accept this side, then, of his work, and are grateful to him for expressing that in us which no English poet has ever expressed so well.

But it would be unfair, on account of these personal poems, to say that Shelley had no serious human aims. There was another side to his poetry. It is the poetry he dedicated to the service of mankind. And it is in this that we find that gravity of substance and matter which Mr. Arnold denies and desires. The matter was not the matter of Wordsworth or Tennyson; it does not treat of human life as it is. But it treats of what is also of great importance to us—of human life as it may become when it is freed from evils. Shelley brought

those evils forward, described them as he hated them, and caused a great and increasing number of people to hate them and oppose them more heartily. Few in poetry have done more than he to overthrow false conceptions of God, to undo the network of false reverences; to shake the foundations of injustice, of cruel superstition, of tyranny, of caste, of slavery of mind and body. This is part of the grave matter of his poetry, and it employs itself in constructive as well as destructive work. He not only denounced injustice, he loved justice and revealed it—not vague justice, but justice made universal in act. Freedom was dear to him, and above all love; and his human poetry is steeped in these as a summer garden is in sunshine. Nor is there any tenderer song of the loveliness and duty of absolute and unrevenging forgiveness than is heard through Shelley's poetry. These are serious things that he has given to us, and the world will always be grateful for this religious gravity in his teaching. It is a high matter for a poet's work, and it will have more and more of effect on men. For the whole question of the social future of man is rising in a special way into increasing eminence; and the method Shelley laid down for attaining the perfect state is that of Jesus Christ; and is stated by him with strong reiteration. That method is in direct opposition to the method of force, of punishment, even to the method of enactment, and the faith in its efficacy was bound up with his whole being. Whatever we may think of the lesson or of the way he gave it, it

is not wanting in grave purpose, nor in substance, nor is it an unsubstantial foundation for poetry. To preach justice and mercy, and love and freedom, to lay down the spiritual means of their attainment, and to extol them in exultant verse, is part of the serious business of all poets, and their best work, as Wordsworth's, has been done at the time when they felt these duties to humanity as a passion. Never to falter in these causes, and to fight against their enemies, without fear of the world or without care, was Shelley's honour, and I would that all poets had been as faithful and as unworldly.

It is true that the form in which this matter was cast was exceedingly ideal, that its verse was sometimes visionary, that it was over-weighted with images, and encumbered by too much ornament, that it does not speak with enough directness; but we are not to deny the matter because of the form, and the form belongs to the whole temper of Shelley's mind. It was his way of putting things of profound importance into verse. And we know how serious they seemed to him when we look at his life. He devoted it to a practical support of these noble ideas. The simple, the unworldly life he lived may well be contrasted with Byron's. It was as retired, as plain, as affectionate as Wordsworth's, and less self-regardant. It never sought for fame. It was lived in the most accurate morality after the troubles of his youth had passed. The man had natural piety. He was pious towards nature, towards his friends, towards the whole

human race, towards the meanest insect of the forest, towards the unimaginable Love whom he did not define, but whom he felt behind and in the universe. Here is the testimony of one who knew him best. 'His life was as simple as a hermit's. He rose early in the morning, walked and read before breakfast, took that meal sparingly, wrote and studied the greater part of the morning, dined on vegetables (for he took neither meat nor wine), conversed with his friends, again walked out, and usually finished with reading to his wife till ten o'clock, when he went to bed. His reading was always among the great books of the world. He was as generous as the day, and he had no idea of love unconnected with sentiment. He worked among the poor, inquired personally into the lives of those who sought his help, visited the sick (having prepared himself for this by going the round of the hospitals), and kept a regular list of industrious poor, whom he assisted with small sums to make up their accounts.'

'Plain living and high thinking' were in England while Shelley lived in it; and we can understand the horror he expressed at Byron's life in Venice, and his feeling that no good poetic work could be done by Byron as long as he continued it. If conduct is so close to high poetry as is said, the poetry of Shelley ought to be full of lofty impulse to mankind; and it has impelled men, and will continue to impel them, to noble thought and action. He believed in goodness, he believed in its ultimate

triumph, and we recommend the belief to an age of scepticism and pessimism. He hated materialism both as a philosophy and a practice, and we recommend the hatred to an age which tends to refer all things to matter, and which seems often to think that to improve the material life of man is all that is needed for the healing of the woes and sins of the human race. He preached the duty of an unworldly life, and he defended the cause of the poor and the workmen; and though he was often the poet of the thin clouds and sunsets of the mind, he also seized on substantial truth as his subject-matter when he preached deliverance to the captive, and to let the oppressed go free. · Moreover, as he grew older, his style became more trenchant whenever he had to deal with his human subject. He still wrote metaphysical dreams like the *Triumph of Life*, but that he could when he pleased go straight to his human matter, and write of it with incisive power, is proved by his fragment of *Charles I.* Would he had finished it; but he was too troubled then. Had not old Proteus taken him, in love of him, we might have had verse from him of 'power no longer girt with weakness.' The lines I quote are direct enough, fitted to be heard to-day by men who see social evils and wish to remedy them, serious, close to the modern as to the ancient evil. They are spoken of the luxuriant pageant that passes by in the midst of the misery and poor of London.

> Ay, there they are—
> Nobles, and sons of nobles, patentees,

Monopolists, and stewards of this poor farm,
On whose lean sheep sit the prophetic crows.
Here is the pomp that strips the houseless orphan,
Here is the pride that breaks the desolate heart.
These are the lilies glorious as Solomon,
Who toil not, neither do they spin,—unless
It be the webs they catch poor rogues withal.
Here is the surfeit which to them who earn
The niggard wages of the earth, scarce leaves
The tithe that will support them till they crawl
Back to its cold hard bosom. Here is health
Followed by grim disease, glory by shame,
Waste by lame famine, wealth by squalid want,
And England's sin by England's punishment.

As to the artistry of his verse, the steady increase of its beauty and temperance, which is observable in the work of the last years of his life, encourages a deep regret that he did not live longer to present us with work of even a greater felicity of diction and manner. When he is at his best, when he has carefully corrected his poetry for publication, he is rarely negligent in his language. He went over his verses again and again, making many experiments, changes, additions, excisions — a poet not easily satisfied with his work; an artist eager for perfection. It is by the poems he allowed to be chosen for publication that he is to be judged as an artist; not by the numerous pieces of unfledged verse which his unbridled admirers have printed. They are worth having, for the most part, because his imagination is always moving in them, but they are not examples of his artistry. This is a distinction which should be made, because those critics who

depreciate Shelley have lumped all his poems together, and use the inferior poems he did not set forth as finished as materials for their criticism.

The technique of his lyrics is, however, rarely in fault. They have a most lovely, singular, high-enchanted charm. Their movement is extraordinarily musical, varied and inventive, and full of sweet, strange changes. But so much has been said of this that I leave it aside. What I wish to dwell on is the blank verse. We have had a great deal of blank verse in England, and written in many fashions since Marlowe began it, and Shakespeare perfected it, in the drama, since Milton clenched it into its proper epic form ; but since Milton wrote the *Samson Agonistes* there has been no dramatic blank verse so free, so natural, yet so dignified, so weighty in sound, so changing in pause, yet so obedient to law, as that which Shelley used with ease. In undramatic poetry, the only modern blank verse which can be compared with Shelley's (to speak only of the dead) is that of Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson. Wordsworth sins from inequality of level and of music; from a frequent dulness, as of accented prose. Keats reaches great ease and beauty in the verse of *Hyperion*, but he does not as yet know his instrument well enough, or he has not made it quite his own. It resembles Milton too much. Tennyson has made his own instrument ; it has its Doric beauty, and the playing on it is full of conscious art. But the art is too much seen, the technique too easy to be imitated. It is over-

mannered, while the blank verse of Mr. Arnold is over over-mannered. But Shelley, even in *Alastor*, used blank verse as if it were his natural tongue. It is sweet and clear and flowing, quite his own, changing with his mood and with the passion of his thought, close-knit or let free, exactly as the mind within him drove, or the subject claimed. But it was by no means finished or formed then. It had a beautiful and graceful nature, but it needed education and practice. It was much more noble in the *Prometheus*, weightier yet easier in *The Cenci*. I am not sure that it is not at its best in the fragment of *Charles I.*, the last piece of blank verse he wrought.

These are the things I had to say concerning Shelley's truth, seriousness of matter, and felicity of musical expression, and with none of them, except partly with the last, will Mr. Arnold agree. But then Mr. Arnold, in this matter of Shelley, has allowed his dislike to Shelley's unsubstantiality to prejudice him against the whole of Shelley's poetry. His judgment has been victimised by his personal fancy, and we have the proof of it from his own lips. Here is his astonishing statement. 'Except for a few short things and single stanzas, his original poetry is less satisfactory than his translations, for in these the subject-matter was found for him.' That is petulant enough, the product of personal feeling, but we may excuse it on the ground of his love of his theory with regard to the subject-matter of poetry. But when once

a man gets on the horse of prejudice it runs away with him, and he loses his critical sanity in some galloping assertion. He is driven into an exaggeration which is all the more amazing, inasmuch as he thinks it marked by excessive temperance. This is, alas! the end of what Arnold says of Shelley: 'Nay, I doubt whether his delightful essays and letters will not resist the wear and tear of time better, and finally come to stand higher, than his poetry.' I do not wonder that Mr. Swinburne said of that very strange and interesting phrase, that no critical reputation, not even the highest, could bear, without ruin, to make a few more judgments of that kind. At any rate, it frees us from being much troubled by the sentence pronounced by Mr. Arnold upon Shelley. On this point he has himself proved his own incapacity to show us any light.

I have said these things in general about Shelley because this is a public lecture, and if one can clear away a public accusation against a poet it is always well. But in the more private work which this Shelley Society proposes to do, such general statements will not be necessary. What will be necessary from those who are convinced of Shelley's greatness will be temperance and distinctiveness in praise. No good is done to Shelley, no good is done to the love of poetry in men, no desire to read a poet is encouraged, by assertions which run into excess. It is as bad, as prejudiced, as wild, to say that he is the greatest poet since Shakespeare, or that he is greater than Wordsworth, without making any distinctions,

as it is to say that his letters will stand higher than his poetry. Both phrases are marked by a want of sanity of judgment. It is only after weighing the whole of Shelley's work, after long consideration of the differences between his character and aims and those of his contemporaries, of the several ranges of their work, that any critic should presume to say in what relation to other poets, and on what an eminence, Shelley should be placed. General praise is a mistake. Criticism does not consist in a number of adjectives, in a number of metaphors, or in a number of hazarded phrases. When it seeks to find out faults, I never think it worth much, but if it is done at all, it ought to be done well, and above all in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves lest we should also be tempted to write.

I also recommend to the Shelley Society not to exalt their poet by attacking other poets. Perhaps you will say I have myself done this, and have attacked Byron. No, were I to write of him, I should not fail to express my honour for the work he did, and for the power with which it was done. I have only spoken of Byron in this fashion because Shelley had been unjustly depreciated in order to exalt Byron.

This is the first advice I presume to give to the Shelley Society. Let praise be temperate and distinctive; else you will repel and not attract members to your ranks. The rest which I have to say is on the subjects which I should like to suggest to the members of this Society.

First, there is the comparison of Shelley's opinions on religious and social topics as stated in his prose with the embodiment of the same opinions in his poetry. The contrast itself is curious. Shelley's views on these matters are put forward in prose, save when the prose is deliberately made poetic as in the fragment of *The Coliseum*, in the quietest, coolest, most balanced manner, and with all the strictness of logic of which he was capable. He reasons in prose on the existence of a great Cause, and of what sort that Cause is ; on the for and against of immortality ; on the evils of society, on the method to overcome them ; on the hopes of man—with as great temperance both of argument and metaphor as if he were Stuart Mill. But when the same subjects are transferred to his poetry, he soars with them into the upper sky, and they become children of the lightning and the sun. But he has always their prose foundation in his own mind.

Then he had a way with him, when writing poetry, of becoming more impassionated than other poets around his subject. All that there was in it of hope, all that in the past it had given of grandeur to the mind of man, and of impulse to human work, added itself to his own passion, and he was borne far beyond the balanced statements of his prose. It would be well worth while to make these comparisons, and to study this manner in the man.

Then, we ought to collect all the prose fragments he wrote on love, and compare them with his poetry on this subject ; I do not mean with the love lyrics,

but with the poems on the idea of love. No one can understand *Alastor*, *Prince Athanase*, *Epipsychidion*, and many of the shorter pieces, who does not know the Platonic idea of love, and the form which Petrarch gave that idea, a form which profoundly influenced Elizabethan poetry. Yet even then, those who wish to penetrate into Shelley's realm of ideal love will have to isolate and separate the new element which Shelley, in his leavening individuality, added to the Platonic conception. This would be well worth doing, and it cannot be done without the help of the prose writings on this subject, such as *Una Favola*, *The Coliseum*, and the short essay, *On Love*.

Then again, there is his theory of a spiritual universe, the special turn of which by Shelley is interesting from the personal point of view, and which in itself requires to be clearly stated, in order to understand not only the expressions used in describing nature, but also many of the poems which refer to death, and the kind of life which he frequently conceives for himself after death, or for his friends. I dare say many will remember (to give an example) the lines on the death of his son, and the closing stanzas of the *Sensitive Plant*. As to the natural descriptions, and the songs about the universe and even the personages themselves in the *Prometheus*, there can be no full delight taken in these till we have grasped Shelley's conception of a living universe, the moving spirit of which was Love. There are many phrases in the prose works which would illustrate and define this conception.

Once more, there are many remarkable descriptions of natural scenery in his letters and his diaries. These have been written with his eye on the subject, and many at the very place, or on the same day as that on which the things described were seen. His memory, like Turner's, retained them, and he used them in his poetry. It would be well to collate and compare the passages in his poems which have been directly taken from scenes he has thus written down in his prose. And the way he has heightened and composed all the detail that he saw into a picture, while retaining truth to natural fact; and has woven the natural scenery in and out with the human passions of which he writes—as in the valley walk in *Alastor*—is a matter of very pleasant and useful study.

And now to close this address. I hope I have not been carried away, in defending Shelley, into excessive praise of him. He has his own high place, one of the great singers, and crowned with his own crown, but he neither sits alone above the rest of the solemn choir of poets, nor does he even sit on a level with others whose range is greater, who have presented to us in their poems a closer image of human life and of the universe, imaginatively expressed with a passionate desire to penetrate to the truth of them.

He is the poet of certain distinct human ideas and of their corresponding emotions, and these ideas are not many; but within their several realms his work has extraordinary intensity, subtle beauty,

passionate impulse, and creative power. That work, though its substance is grave and weighty, is often too idealised into a world of woven dreams. Substances were thinned out into shadowy expressions of them, or seemed to disappear in a multitude of fancies added to them; but the substantial truths were always steadfast behind the scaffolding or the ornament. It was his way to do this. It was not a weakness of capacity, but an inability to check the outpouring of his thought. The substance of truth is clear in the *Prometheus Unbound*, but the expression of it is so multitudinous with imagery that while we wonder and rejoice in it, we sometimes wish our amazement were less, and our joy not so overwhelming. On the other hand, in his personal poetry Shelley wrote in the unsubstantial faery land in which at least half of his inner life was passed. The immaterial world was then his natural world, not only fancifully but philosophically. When he lived with nature, when he spoke of love, when he voyaged with metaphysical ideas, he breathed with ease that supersensuous air. The dreams he saw were inspired by his own witch of Atlas.

> On a poet's lips I slept
> Dreaming like a love-adept
> In the sound his breathing kept;
> Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
> But feeds on the aerial kisses
> Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
> He will watch from dawn to gloom
> The lake-reflected sun illume
> The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,

Nor heed nor see what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!
One of these awakened me,
And I sped to succour thee.

It is foolish to say that these dreams and these subtle films of visionary thought are not subjects for poetry. They form a great part of our life. Even Wordsworth knew well what they were.

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

O blessed bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, fairy place
That is fit home for thee.

And much of the pure passion of life must have left us when we can no more read with pleasure the lyrics in which Shelley clothed the shapes that haunted the wildernesses of his thought.

It might perhaps have been better—supposing that we could have got it without spoiling the man and his art—if Shelley had considered oftener, in his poetry concerning human matters, the 'nest upon the dewy ground,' and not have so constantly sung high up in the sky in a 'privacy of glorious light.' Yet, there are many whom this pleases and whom it impels. The heart which in spring loves to listen to the lark lost to sight, better than it does to the thrush singing of the loves of earth and of its

home upon the beech in the wood, is pleased with Shelley more than with Wordsworth, and gains from him what it does not gain from Wordsworth. And those who like the thrush best have no right to abuse those who love that song of the lark which, as it mounts higher, fades away. It also is a song in the soul of man.

Again, it may be that they who cry down Shelley have lost the pleasure of looking for a golden year, the hope of the redemption of man; and in that loss have ceased to feel the divine heat of anger with the evils that beset and oppress mankind. They are content to take the world as it comes, and to meet its troubles day by day. These have their place and do their work. But they ought to tolerate those who are like Shelley, uncontent, and whose uncontent makes them look forward with unconquered hope to a new world, unsubstantial as yet save to the eye of faith; men who find in Shelley the expression of their indignation, of their ideal, and of the kingdom of the great Three who abide for man, Faith, Hope, and Love. And if the song be as yet called Utopian, if it be clothed in visions like those of the Apocalypse, it does not follow that it has not a living and a serious subject-matter. It is a subject-matter which few great poets have not sustained and adorned. It engaged the ancient prophets, it belonged to Jesus Christ, it was sung by Virgil. Neither Dante nor Milton disdained the thoughts and the emotions of the restitution of all things.

For myself, I wish that subject-matter were always before the hopes and in the hearts of men. I wish the faith in it were as strong in the lives of present men as it was in the life of Shelley. The life of the poor would then be brighter, and their endurance of the iniquity of society easier. Hope would create from its own wreck the thing it contemplates. A more spiritual life would balance our materialism. The making of wealth and comfort would be less the religion of England. The idleness and worldliness of man would be more shamed into work and into simplicity. It is the nature of a great faith and hope to make life simple. Philosophy would be less narrow, science less insolent, scepticism less vain, and that opinion —the ultimate result of having neither faith nor hope nor love—'that this world is the worst possible world,' cease to be the last refuge and the last repose for the heart of man.

Were society to alter, as it must soon alter or disintegrate, away from this condition, and live more in the hopes, and with the aims, and in the simple life of Shelley; and along with these possess also his sanity of view, it would then understand how curiously foolish it is to call him 'a beautiful, but ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.' Towards that social change his work in poetry concerning man is one element of power; and it moves far more strongly than is believed among the numerous body in the 'working classes' who think and feel concerning the condition

of humanity. It is *not* ineffectual. There are those, and too many of them sometimes for our patience, who receive Shelley and extol him as an exquisite lyrist, but who, thinking only of their secluded and exclusive palace of art, have no sympathy with the ideal hopes for man which Shelley cherished, and who, in the midst of their formulated and fading culture whose main characteristics are the absence of a social conscience and the absence of any love of man, imagine that they represent the leading thoughts and the fine spirit of humanity. There are others, not quite so conceited or so futile as those folk, who think that the *Welt-Geist* moves most vividly, most effectually, in the educated part of society. I do not think that their opinion is true; nor indeed has history testified to the truth of that opinion, but to the very contrary. The life of the World-Spirit, as it energises now in England, is most vivid in the ideas, hopes, dreams, and passionate feelings which, unformed, are yet taking form in the poor, the overworked, the oppressed; in the rude brains, and the emotional thoughts of the steadfast, struggling workers of this country—those who never despair though they have every reason to despair, who fight on against overwhelming odds, and die content because they believe in the coming into reality of their ideal; many of whom have not where to lay their head, who are despised and rejected of men, and acquainted with grief, those of whom it may be said—'How know these men letters, having never learned?' These, as they

slowly weave their conceptions into form, love Shelley and find in him their poet, and perhaps their priest. If men wish to be in the forefront of the future, to live in the ideas which will, a century hence, rule the world, let them live among the men who are indignant, and who hope, with Shelley; who have his faith, who hear the trumpet of a prophecy, and whose cry day and night is this:

O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

THE LYRICS OF SHELLEY

THERE have been few men who were more swiftly led away by impulse than Shelley. He was impelled from within by his own thoughts, and they immediately swept him away into the emotions which belonged to them ; and in these emotions he all but forgot the thoughts from which they took their rise. This is the genesis of a number of his lyrics, and of a number of the errors he made in life.

He was also impelled from without by impressions made on him by the loveliness of nature, or by the evil or the good of man ; and these impressions were at once hurried by his temperament into an extremity of feeling which was translated, white-hot, into poetry which for the most part was lyrical, or verged on the lyrical. It is in the lyrical region that the poetry was written which gives him a special place among the masters.

If we think of the longer poems, we may say that the *Prometheus Unbound* is more of a Titanic lyric than a drama ; half of it might be called a congeries of lyrics. The *Witch of Atlas*, *Adonais*, are not lyrics, but they share in the nature of a

lyric. *Alastor*, beyond the descriptions of nature which are fitted, as it were by an afterthought, to the moods of the wandering poet, is lyrical in its unity of emotion, in that high mournful note which slowly rises, then races upwards, culminates and falls. *Hellas* is worth little as long as it tries to be dramatic, but pure lyrics burst out of it like fountains. *Epipsychidion* is not a lyric, but is like a lyric expanded into a poem. Its emotion is one; its subject is one; and its intensity of expression is equal to its emotion. It, too, but much more passionately than *Alastor*, rises, rushes on, culminates, falls and dies breathless with its own passion, exactly like a lyric. *The Cenci* stands alone. It is pure drama. In it Shelley has carefully, for the sake of the dramatic ideal, repressed, subdued his impetuous tendency to lyrical expression. As to the *Triumph of Life*, no one can say what that poem would have become.

The other long poems—the social and controversial poems—*Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Rosalind and Helen*, are broken, unequal, disunited work; and *Julian and Maddalo*, though praise has been lavished on it, has always seemed to me unfortunately prosaic. They have splendid passages, where the poetic emotion has either mastered the ill-composed form in which the poem is cast, or where the form is wholly abandoned, but these passages are too ardent and lovely for the rest of the poem. They almost annihilate the rest of the poem. They alone remain on the mind. They are of Shelley's inmost nature, and I hear, far off, the lyrical cry in them.

This is one half of his poetry, and with this we have nothing more to do. The other half is, with a few exceptions, made up of pure lyrics ; and I will dwell on some of their characteristics on which I have not already elsewhere written.

The lyric proper is the product of a swift, momentary, and passionate impulse, coming from without for the most part, suddenly awaking the poet, as it were out of a dream, into vivid life, seizing upon him, and setting him on fire with its grasp, until he believes it is his very self which speaks—replacing, that is, the poet's own life by the life of the impulse, until the impulse has absorbed in him everything else but itself ; and bringing with it the form it has to take, so that the whole poem leaps into being before it is written down. When a lyric rises into form in a great poet, it is always in fire that it rises. But the temperament of the poet conditions the mode of the fire. It is for the most part a short-lived fire, but it burns more quietly in some, as in Wordsworth ; more hotly in others, as in Byron ; with every kind of intensity in various poets. In Shelley it burns slowly for a time, then flares to heaven in a rush of flame, then sinks and dies as swiftly as it flamed. It is as momentary as a meteor in him, and its substance is vaporised by its own heat.

As such it will have a limited but an unbroken unity. One emotion only, one thought only, will dominate it, though naturally it will have changes ; varied representations of this one thing, many

branches from one root, gradations of colour in the same water, different tones in the one voice. Shelley is supreme in changes wrought into one theme.

Having this single-eyed unity, the lyric proper will be simple in form and ornament. Many lyric poets lose the natural simplicity of the lyric by over-ornament. They make their poem flamboyant; adorn it from the outside, like some Renaissance palaces, with garlands of thoughts and emotions which have no clear relation to the subject, and which destroy its proportion. The reason of that is that the original impulse has either not been intense enough, or the fire of emotion not hot enough, or that as he writes the poet has grown chill. When the passion is intense enough, it burns up the needless, it attains simplicity. There is nothing so simple in the world as pure passion; not only of love, but of hate and hope and melancholy, despair and jealousy and joy. Any one of these, at white heat, becomes simple. The too-much, either in ornament or thought, cannot live in passion. It rejects as it moves all that is weak or useless.

Shelley comes nearer to the fiery, swift, yet simple form of the lyric than any modern poet. He is rarely led away into ornament which overweights his poem, but he sometimes is. For example, I wish in the ode *To a Skylark* all these comparisons of the lark's song to a poet hidden in the light of thought, to a high-born maiden in a palace tower, to a glow-worm golden in a dell of dew, to a rose

embowered in its leaves, were blown away to all the winds, or at least embodied in another lyric where they might fit the single passion of the theme. They are flamboyant, and every one, instead of bringing us closer to the lark in the heavens, separates us from his singing. But, on the whole, no one except Burns among the modern poets is nearer than Shelley to the pure lyric—that thing so rare and beautiful that all the world when it hears its cry is hushed in delight.

Perhaps it was his life in Italy which ministered to this power. In England, nature and the passionate moments of human feeling slowly make their way into the heart, and though the climax of them is swift, shortlived, and simple in the lyrics of the great poets, yet the original movement has not been rushing, and the fulness of the passionate impulse is not always reached. But in Italy, in the warm and living air both of nature and man, impulses come in a flashing light and glow, and while they last pulsate like the colour-changing lightning of Italian nights. Shelley was Italian in this, and his lyrics have the rush and impetuosity of the south.

Then, who that has an ear for rhythm is not delighted with the musical changes of his lyrics? Every lyric ought to bring with it its isolated music, and to be alone in that, but the varied changes of the one emotion, the one theme, should have each its own subtle and natural expression. In these and the full music of the whole poem, Shelley's excellence is as easy as it is instinctive—nay, in its

instinctiveness, in its inevitable vibration of rhythm in harmony with the vibration of emotion, is the chief loveliness of Shelley's lyrical music.

These are general considerations of Shelley's lyric work. It is time to turn to the particulars in it which distinguish it from the lyric work of other poets.

Of what kind, we ask, were his lyrics of nature? His impassioned treatment of nature in his short poems varied according to the mood he was in. Sometimes he saw nature as one and indivisible; as a spiritual being who through all her forms, while she remained inconceivable love and unity, 'spreads undivided, operates unspent'—and the Hymn to Asia —'Life of Life, thy lips enkindle'—is an example of this mood with nature. If a great physicist, having for many days meditated on the myriad life in nature, upbuilding itself, from its apparently inorganic movement in matter into worlds out of mists of fire, to its inconceivably various vegetable, animal, and human organisms arising out of a single cell; and having thus meditated, should then pass on in his thought to be momentarily conscious of himself as the centre of this immeasurable life of the universe and of its passionate will to live—if then he should fall asleep, and passing in a dream from the scientific into the imaginative world, should realise as a personality the source of this universal life, and realise it as feminine—the Alma Venus, the warm generative

principle—he would in his dream be impelled to make for her exactly the song that Shelley made for Asia. It is a wonderful thing. The soul, the passion of the imaginative physicist is in it.

That is one form in which Shelley's lyric contemplation of nature appeared. There are other lyrics which look on nature, not as one Being, but as many beings; in which every natural object or phenomenon has its own life, and acts and thinks and plays like a man or a child, without any conscience or self-consciousness; in which nature, that is, is seen as the men of the mythical periods saw her.

In the ancient myths the doings of nature, and especially of the sky, are impersonated and described as the doings of men or animals. The dawn is said to fly before the rising sun. The summer-god contends with and conquers the winter and is conquered in turn by the winter giants. The rays of the sun are the arrows of the sun-god. The great elongated globes of the rain-cloud hanging down with their weight of water are the distended udders of the cows of Indra. Such mythical representations have passed into all our poetry, even into our daily speech. But they exist in it chiefly in the form of adjectives, or in certain well-known images which science has never induced us to surrender. But we make no new myths. These impersonations of the doings of nature live no longer in the faith of reason. It is therefore with some wonder and much pleasure that in Shelley we find ourselves with

a poet who was so detached from both the present and the past as to be frequently in the very position of mind in which an early Aryan thought; and therefore to be able to make new nature-myths of his own; to feel nature, and to see her doings as a child who belonged to the childhood of the world. Goethe now and then fixed himself in that position, and made a myth or two, but he did it consciously and even laboriously. Shelley did it quite naturally, exactly as a man a hundred thousand years ago might have done it. The only difference, a difference he could not help, was in the artistic shape of the thing done. This is a thing extraordinarily rare; it is even rare in Shelley himself. Pure specimens of it would occur oftener if Shelley had not also had a metaphysical theory of the universe which led him to say that the whole world was the apparent form of supreme Love and Thought; led him, that is, to express and think that theory at intervals, for he was far too changing to hold any theory of that kind for long. When he felt it, he could not of course make a nature-myth. Any kind of pantheism excludes the imagery of the occurrences of nature by the action of persons or animals. But when Shelley felt especially the child and was bored by his metaphysic, he being of the momentary momentary, and delighted with a change of view, and pleased like a Greek to give life to everything, became almost as young as the earlier world, and made new nature-myths, like the young heathen that he was. We have them, not quite simple, not fully shaped, in

separate lines. Here is an early and imperfect example :

> Twilight, ascending slowly from the east,
> Entwined in duskier wreaths her braided locks
> On the fair front and radiant eyes of day.

That has not the inevitable childishness of a nature-myth, it is too elaborate, nor is it alive enough or direct enough.

Here is another :

> Old winter has gone
> In his weakness back to the mountains hoar,

and another poem takes up again that winter and summer myth which we meet everywhere ; but that is not a new myth, not of his own making. He creates the Winter with a northern vigour in *The Sensitive Plant.* Thor himself would not have disdained to meet this Frost-Giant who tears the cataracts from the hills and hangs them to his girdle. Then there is the poem about the Apennine. It is a mountain dim and grey in the daylight, but at night, when the storm comes, it rises from its place and walks abroad. There is a myth half made. At night it is a true being, but Shelley's modern consciousness denies the life of the mountain by day. Then there is the impersonation in the *Prometheus* of the earth and of the moon. The earth, asleep in the midst of a whirling sphere of crystal, itself built up of ten thousand orbs involving and involved ; the description of what is seen within the sphere, and what the beams which shoot from the stars on the brow of

the earth reveal of all the secrets of the earth—is not mythical, but physical and metaphysical imagination. But the image of the moon is nature-myth; every touch is made out of the doings of nature. Within the chariot

> sits a wingèd infant, white
> Its countenance, like the whiteness of bright snow,
> Its plumes are as feathers of sunny frost,
> Its limbs gleam white, through the wind-flowing folds
> Of its white robe, woof of ethereal pearl.
> Its hair is white, the brightness of white light
> Scattered in strings; yet its two eyes are heavens
> Of liquid darkness, which the Deity
> Within seems pouring, as a storm is poured
> From jaggèd clouds, out of their arrowy lashes,
> Tempering the cold and radiant air around,
> With fire that is not brightness; in its hand
> It sways a quivering moonbeam, from whose point
> A guiding power directs the chariot's prow
> Over its wheelèd clouds, which as they roll
> Over the grass, and flowers, and waves, wake sounds,
> Sweet as a singing rain of silver dew.

This might be written of the moon-god in India.

Still, in this there are so many comparisons, 'like this, like that,' that we see the poet was not quite unconscious of what he was doing, as an early man would have been, who would have said more directly what he thought. When we get to a line like this, however, we get almost to the early directness. The clouds are sheep that pass through the sky

> Shepherded by the slow unwilling wind.

And when we get to this little lyric we meet the

pure simple thing, and the new thing, an actual fresh-minded myth in the nineteenth century :

> The pale stars are gone!
> For the Sun, their swift shepherd,
> To their folds them compelling,
> In the depths of the dawn,
> Hastes, in meteor-eclipsing array, and they flee
> Beyond his blue dwelling,
> As fawns flee the leopard.

The last three lines disturb the image, but the first four are pure myth, and so is this :

> And the young and dewy Dawn
> Bold as an unhunted fawn
> Up the windless Heaven is gone.

And among them—the most astonishing of all—is *The Cloud.* It is not only a myth of the Cloud ; the cloud is accompanied by a host of other impersonations of nature—the sanguine sunrise with his meteor eyes, the orbèd maiden of the moon, the imprisoned giant of the thunder, the lightning which runs through the sky to find his love,—all are touched into life, and yet there is not one phrase, not one adjective which is contradictory of, or which does not illuminate, natural fact.

These examples would not perhaps be enough to prove my statement, were there not so many of the half-and-half myths of which I have instanced one. The *Hymn of Apollo* is one of these. The sleepless Hours watch the dreaming God. Their mother, the Gray Dawn, warns them to awaken him when the Moon is gone. He rises and walks over the moun-

tains and the waves, he leaves his robe on the sea, his footsteps pave the clouds with fire, the Earth is his mistress whom he embraces, he feeds the clouds and flowers with their colours; and all the light of the universe, from the pure stars to the lamps of earth, are portions of his power; he stands on the peak of Heaven, he wanders down with unwilling steps into the clouds of even. All that is pure nature-myth, and it is not borrowed. It is fresh work done freshly by this ancient youth.

But in the very same poem we are brought into that later stage of human thought when the natural myth was moralised, when the personages were made gods, and the gods the sources of morality and the inventors of beauty. We are in that world when we read

> The sunbeams are my shafts, with which I kill
> Deceit, that loves the night and fears the day:
> All men who do or even imagine ill
> Fly me, and from the glory of my ray
> Good minds and open actions take new might,
> Until diminished by the reign of Night.

So also, when we come to the last verse, and the sun becomes the lord of science and beauty, and both are at one in him; and he, feeling their eternal harmony, and that they are harmony, rejoices in his own being in the universe—we have passed into that further world where a million myths of nature which predicated a million separate lives in every one of the million things to which the mythical imagination gave life, have become one im-

measurable life. Unity fills our imagination of the Sun-Godhead instead of diversity, yet diversity is not lost, but secured. And more, not only nature but all the work of man is taken up into the one, universal life.

> I am the eye with which the Universe
> Beholds itself and knows itself divine;
> All harmony of instrument and verse,
> All prophecy, all medicine is mine,
> All light of art or nature; to my song
> Victory and praise in its own right belong.

This lyric is, then, a concentration of two ages of human thought concerning nature. Nay, it is a short record of the progress of human thought from the mythical to the philosophical conception of nature.

At other times Shelley sees and describes things in nature as they are in themselves, as they were before myth-making man was born into the universe—and as he describes, he himself is wholly detached from them. It is true, he makes them alive. It is no dead matter which is working, but living powers, doing the things that please them; and we may think that Shelley has imposed on material things his own life. But that was not his intention. He really believed that the cloud and the stream and the flower and the sea, even the cell, were alive, had the will to live, and worked for this, and played as they worked; and the trend of the latest philosophy of the universe is not far apart from this belief of his. At any rate, he alone among the poets could see natural

things, and chose sometimes to see them, as they were in themselves, wholly independent of our thought or feeling; and he made poems on this vision of them. Not one suspicion of humanity belongs to them, not one word brings into them a shred of human feeling. For that reason, while we admire them, we do not love them, but their uniqueness and their strangeness is astonishing. Of these poems *The Cloud* is the most finished example. I have mentioned it as an instance of his myth-making power. But in that case it ought to have some relation to humanity, and indeed, when the poem is more fully considered, the personages in it have no such relation. They are alive; that is all the connection they have with us. They are purely elemental. The sanguine sunrise, the meteor moon, the thunder in the caves of earth, the march of the clouds through the rainbow arch, the clouds building and upbuilding themselves in the air and laughing at their own tricks—it may all have occurred, and did occur, in the Silurian period. More than half of it is even true of the doings of the Fire-mist out of which the solar system grew. Not one phrase takes us away from that illusion. There is not a word of human interest, not even a word which brings the poet himself into any relation with the object described. We are not conscious of Shelley at all as we read *The Cloud*.

This is a power which, as exercised by Shelley, belongs to him alone among the poets. There are few who can escape from their own self-conscious-

ness or from the overwhelming consciousness of the world of humanity. Shelley, on the contrary, could strip himself clean of humanity and of Shelley, and move among the elements like one of themselves. Hence there arises, as I have said elsewhere, this curious thing, that describing natural occurrences as if they were the doings of living things, and describing them in terms of the highest imagination, he yet, because he has wholly got rid of the deceiving mist of human emotion and thought concerning them, describes them with an accuracy which we might almost call scientific. *The Cloud* might be lectured upon by a meteorologist. So might this little passage describing the fate of a globe of dew, from dawn to sunset.

> As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold
> A half unfrozen dew-globe, green and gold,
> And crystalline, till it becomes a winged mist
> And wanders up the vault of the blue day,
> Outlives the noon, and on the sun's last ray
> Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst.

That is pure science in lovely verse. But Shelley elsewhere takes the same operation of nature and treats it in the mythical way, giving to every globe of vapour its own life, and mingling their life up with the life of the spirits who make music in the woods—so changing were his poetic moods. Here, the Faun in the *Prometheus* speaks :

> I have heard those more skilled in spirits say,
> The bubbles, which the enchantment of the sun
> Sucks from the pale faint water-flowers that pave
> The oozy bottom of clear lakes and pools,

Are the pavilions where such dwell and float
Under the green and golden atmosphere
Which noontide kindles through the woven leaves;
And when these burst, and the thin fiery air,
The which they breathed within those lucent domes,
Ascends to flow like meteors through the night,
They ride on them, and rein their headlong speed,
And bow their burning crests, and glide in fire
Under the waters of the earth again.

These two powers—the power of making fresh myths out of nature, and that of describing nature imaginatively and yet with scientific truth, are but two examples of separate powers which other poets, more limited by conventions of thought, can scarcely be said to possess, or if they possess, to use. It is the existence of these distinct capacities which, as we read Shelley, continually brings us into strange and unaccustomed worlds of thought and emotion. Then, translated into these unknown and delightful realms, we are enchanted—if we can see them.

It may be said that such representations of nature are one-sided representations. A poet ought to be able to represent nature and humanity in their mutual questions and replies, and to make imaginative the various theories of their relations. It is true; but I have dwelt here only on what was unique in Shelley's imaging of nature. He can do the ordinary business as well as any other poet of his century and, like each of them, with a difference of his own. There are many poems founded on theoretic conceptions of nature, first as the form which intellectual beauty (that is, our idea of the

beauty that exists in the intellect of the whole) takes; and secondly, as the living and breathing image, in a million lovely shapes, of all-sustaining, all-kindling love. There are also a crowd of lyrics in which nature and man are clasped together like the hands of two lovers. There are other poems in which nature and her life are made the source of reflections on human life. There are descriptions of nature which gradually lead up to one great image in which is embodied a generalisation of a great crisis in human history. I take one, a well-known passage:

> Hark! the rushing snow!
> The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
> Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
> Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
> As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
> Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
> Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.

With regard, then, to Shelley's poetry of nature, and of nature and man, there are, first, only a few strings of the great harp of nature and man, the strings of which are made of the fibres of the human heart, and the sounding wood of which is nature herself, on which Shelley does not play with ease. And secondly, with regard to nature alone, there are strings of her lonely harp on which no one has ever played but himself, strings whose vibration is so high and shrill and faint to the human ear that there are few who hear their music aright. That double statement is my contention.

When we leave the lyrics which concern nature, and nature and man, we come to those which are concerned only with human life, with its passion and its thought. It is not possible, in a short essay like this, to treat of these with the fullness they deserve, or to give examples of their several kinds. I can only isolate and distinguish a few of them.

There are, first, those that embody his passing personal impressions with regard to human life, of which there are some strange utterances. The general spirit which informs their diverse moods is, however, collected into one thought in the *Triumph of Life*, the last poem he wrote, where he describes the overthrow by life of all the aspirations, joys, and work of men. The inexorable destruction of humanity by its own life is the subject of that poem, a poem modern in its pessimism, but from which Shelley would, had he lived, have freed himself, as he has already begun to do at the close of that fragment. That motive, however, is the impulse of a number of lyrics.

Again, there are all the love lyrics, and a curious revelation they are of the ever-changing, indifferent, indefinite character of his passion, which fled from its fulfilment as if it were an enemy who would rob him of all joy since it robbed him of pursuit and limited the illimitable. On these and on their temper I have already dwelt in the Introduction I wrote to the *Selections from Shelley*.[1]

[1] Golden Treasury Series. Macmillan and Co.

What I have not said in that Introduction is that there are a whole class of Shelley's lyrics which defy analysis ; which purposely darken and blur the outlines of thought and emotion whenever those outlines tend to become clear ; which laugh at method ; which, when we think we catch their meaning, glide into something else, leaving the thought we seemed to attain unfinished ; in which nothing is finished ; but which, all the same, leave a vivid impression behind them of the state of Shelley's feeling, and are representative of those worlds of feeling of which we are often conscious, but which, being like vapour incessantly involved and never remaining the same for a single instant, we can never realise. These answer to the things which the impressionist school of painters endeavour to produce, and, when a genius is at work, succeed in producing. Here is one verse :

> There is regret, almost remorse,
> For Time long past.
> 'Tis like a child's belovèd corse
> A father watches, till at last
> Beauty is like remembrance, cast
> From Time long past.

And who is to explain or bring into either emotional or intellectual consideration the long lyric of the *Witch of Atlas* ? It belongs to a world in which thought seeks no end, and no emotion has ever time to feel itself because another emotion instantly overtakes it. It is made up of the thousand thousand impulses and imaginations Shelley had received and sheltered from moment to moment,

while he wandered among the mountains, glens, and streams near Pisa and Lucca. He flung them all around the person of his Witch, and knitted them into a poem as indefinite, as fantastic, as aerial as she, and as enchanting. It stands alone in poetry. Men who seek its meaning will give it a hundred different meanings; but it has no special meaning. It is the joyous, unchartered dancing of Shelley's soul in the elfin world where, when he pleased, he lived. It is not serious, the critics say, it is not a criticism of life. Yet it will be read with pleasure a thousand years hence, and will satisfy a certain not uncommon mood of constant humanity.

Then there are all the lyrics of liberty and hope for the poor and the oppressed. Some of these are so written that in them also Shelley stands somewhat alone among English poets. Only a few, like Ebenezer Elliott, have written poems like the *Address to the Men of England*, like the *Masque of Anarchy*, on events in the social struggle at the time of the events, and on the side of the people against its oppressors. Other poets have generalised on the past: they have written about battles in which the glory of England is displayed; they have written against the foreigner, if he were at war with us; but they have not gone direct to the quick, as Shelley did with a sacred indignation. They have not written against the powerful with a careless courage, nor pierced into the heart of that struggle of the poor for a good and happy life which is the great war of the world, not only in England, but in

every modern nation. Shelley sympathised with that strife when other poets despised or ignored it, and his songs upon it, few as they are, might be sung to-day, when the battle has deepened into organised war.

The cry of these lyrics which had to do with the present was completed by lyrics which celebrated the hopes of the future, and by others which described the happier world to come. This was one of the main regions of his longer poems, from the ill-knit work of *Queen Mab* and the *Revolt of Islam* to the magnificent restitution of man and nature in the *Prometheus Unbound*. If we were audacious we might rank that poem among lyrics. It is like a lyric written in a larger world than ours, on a mighty scale, for a universal music, by a great Archangel; by Raphael who in his glory still compassionates the earth.

The *Ode to Liberty*, in its large imaginative grasp of the story of human freedom, passes from the days of savagery to the various kinds of liberty which Athens and Rome, England and Italy, Luther, Milton, and the French Revolution, gave to the world, and from them, with a fierce denunciation of kings and priests, to the praise of perfect Freedom—freedom that never can remain freedom, unless it bring with it, as comrades and assessors, Wisdom and Love and Justice and the Fame 'of what has been, the Hope of what will be.'

The *Ode to Naples* is born of the same spirit, but is confined to freedom in Italy; and as he wrote,

the spirit of beauty, the child of profound love, which Shelley felt moving through every grain of Italian earth, through every cell of Italian air, is mingled up with the spirit of liberty. Its main cry is that without freedom no beauty can be seen, and none worshipped.

These odes are good, but they are over-elaborated. They are passionate, but their passion is not always natural. They have the air of being schemed beforehand, even of being written to order. But then, nearly all odes seem to share in these faults. The form of the ode seems to suggest them. It is, on the whole—except perhaps in Keats—the least satisfactory of lyric forms.

The songs in *Hellas* are of a finer quality, and they mingle up with their cry for liberty noble aspiration towards a new-created world and unflinching hope for its advent. It is a hope he never quite surrendered, even in the last years; and its most lofty and clarion note is in the prophetic music of the *Ode to the West Wind*. And for this prophecy which our modern poets are too sad, too weary with themselves, to touch with any apocalyptic fervour, too conscious of the trouble and confusion in which they live to write of with any joy, we give Shelley an incessant gratitude.

With the songs in *Hellas* the prophetic element in the lyrics of Shelley is no more. The personal element now becomes supreme. His hopes for man, his faith in the coming of a just and love-ruled world seem to have faded into weariness. The

greater part of *Hellas* is apathetic work, lashed into a false excitement. A few of the choruses and of the songs, especially the beautiful verses at the close; the little piece of Shelley's philosophic views of the universe which Ahasuerus delivers to the Sultan, to his humorous confusion—are true and vital forms of Shelley's thoughts and emotion. The rest is unworthy of his powers. He passed from them in 1822 into purely personal lyrics, and on these I have elsewhere already written.

Finally, I should like to dwell on the unconscious logic in arrangement of some of Shelley's lyrics. I have said of a certain class of them that they have little clearness or method, or continuity of thought or emotion. They wander and drift, as it were, without an aim. But with others, and those the best, it is not so, but the very contrary. They have a logical arrangement of their own. This is not so uncommon a thing in poetry as those imagine who think that the poet, driven by a kind of divine mania beyond himself, works without knowing where he is going or how he will get to the end. There is a logic of emotion as well as of thought, and though it does produce itself without a previous scheme, it appears when the lyric is done, and, if the poet have great genius, in a clear order which may be subjected by those who are not the poet himself to an analysis as rigid as that to which we can subject a great musical composition. The poet himself is indeed swept away, but all throughout his torrent movement he follows a course which is obedient to a develop-

ment of his emotion as natural and as orderly as a process of nature. I think this is true with regard to all the great lyrics of the world; and it is true especially of Shelley, because his intellect played so large a part in the whole of his work. It was accustomed to do close work, and when the emotion was first, as it is in poetry, and carried him away, his intellect, in rejoicing subordination, went with the emotion, working in harmony with it and working as a willing servant, so that the result, which was fully emotional, possessed also an intellectual order. I suggest one example in the little lyric—*When the Lamp is Shattered.* The first verse uses four comparisons to illustrate the passing of love. These are taken up and re-used in different ways throughout the rest of the poem, as if they were four themes which a musician brings in, at intervals, into the main idea, in order to emphasise various forms of its passion. It is a subtle weaving, but a reader, similarly emotionalised as the poet, may pass easily and clearly through its labyrinth. Such a logic of emotion may be found throughout *Epipsychidion*, where metaphors seem to run riot. They are all really held in hand. I give another instance from *Alastor*, where Shelley is describing the dying frame of the wanderer:

> A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
> The breath of heaven did wander—a bright stream
> Once fed with many-voicèd waves—a dream
> Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
> Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now.

The last line takes up in its adjectives the three illustrations. The lute is still, the stream is dark and dry, the dream is unremembered. But the finest example of this characteristic quality is the *Ode to the West Wind*, and though I do not like analysing a poem any more than I care to dissect a flower, yet for once, and to see Shelley's way, and as conclusion and illustration of this essay, it may be permitted.

He has been walking by the Arno, in the wood which skirts it, among the fallen leaves, and has seen the congregated clouds rising from the south-west to usher in the yearly storm with which the autumnal rains begin in October in Italy ; and the tempestuous motion of the trees and the clouds awakens the tempestuous passion of his heart, so easily raised, so stormily uplifted, so transient when its power was spent. Then the impulse from without and the awakened impulse within, mingling in passionate embrace, brought forth the poem. I can well imagine the first lines leaping from his lips in a moment—thought, emotion, metre, movement—all rushing together into a self-creation.

It begins with the West Wind rushing through the wood like a living river, and bearing with it the dead leaves—yellow and black and hectic red—the Destroyer, the wild spirit who buries the dead. But with the dead leaves are also the wingèd seeds which the wind too bears to their rest, where they may quicken when Spring blows her clarion—Preserver, then, as well as Destroyer.

I

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes; O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and Preserver: hear, oh, hear!

The same theme is repeated, with clear strange changes, in the sky, then in the ocean, then in Shelley's own heart, and then for the whole of man. Nothing can be intellectually clearer than the order, and yet the emotion is always the master, the lord of the poem. Nay more, the images used in these several repetitions are similar, though fresh images are continually added.

He sees in the sky, where the storm is beginning, the same things he has seen in the wood. Heaven, and ocean from whose bosom all the waters came, are now the great forest through which the wind is sweeping like a broad and surging river. The sky, before the huge mass of cloud brings with it the steady wind, is full of rushing and separate avant-couriers of small dark clouds, red and pale and black, that fly over the sky. These are the leaves

of this forest of the sky, and are shaken down upon the stream and surge of the wind. That image, then, and daring it is, is bound up with and repeats the first verse. But Shelley, thrilled as he looked by the splendour of the tempest, and driven by his emotion to change the image that he might better feel the passion of the hour and represent it better, now sees the coming clouds like the pageant of the burial of the year; a vast and congregated procession, to which night is the sepulchral dome, and out of which black rain and fire and hail will burst — new images of that which he originally imaged as the black and red leaves of the wood. Before this the loose clouds fly like Mænads, their locks blown forward by the wind, and the wind itself is the dirge of the year, the impersonated sorrow of all that has been, but which it now destroys. For in this verse that side of the West Wind which makes it the Destroyer, and not the Preserver, the God that slays rather than saves, is given.

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain and fire and hail will burst: oh, hear!

But the next verse shows the West Wind as the kindlier impetuosity of the universe. The theme in the first verse of the wind as the Preserver, as the giver of life, as life itself, is taken up. The wind wakens now the blue Mediterranean, for we have passed from the forest, from the wind on the earth, from the wind in the sky, to the wind upon the sea. He wakens the loveliness of the isles in Baiæ's bay; he disturbs the sleep of the waters in which lay the old palaces and towers—freshly, brightly disturbs them. Then the theme changes as before: one picture is not enough for Shelley, nor one aspect of his theme. We are swept back again into the thought of the wind as Destroyer. From the Mediterranean we are borne into the Atlantic, and again the original image recurs. The sea itself is like the forest. It cleaves itself into chasms before the fierce stream of the wind. The woods of ocean, the sea-blooms, and the sapless foliage grow grey with fear, and tremble and despoil themselves.

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay;
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

Then in the next verse, having finished with earth and sky and sea, he takes up a side issue of emotion, which has reference to himself—he who is earth and sky and sea in one. Enthralled by the swiftness and strength of the wind, he wishes to be lifted and borne on the river of its strength. But even then he does not forget to link this new issue to the original theme. He takes up forest and sky and ocean in his repeating way: If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear—If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee—If I were a wave to share thy impulse of thy strength—If I were even what I was when young I seemed thy equal, scarce less swift than thou—I would not be so full of prayer to thee; but I am as weak as thou art strong, O lift me—and again knitting his thought into his emotion, not letting us loose from the first theme, he repeats in change the images: 'O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud.'

I know nothing of music, but if this is not like

the way a musician works his changes, I should be surprised.

Then, lastly, he returns from this side issue to the main emotion and the main image. He himself is now the forest, his leaves are falling. They are his thoughts, multitudes of which have withered and died. Through him the wind is passing, the wind of the universe, and it drives his thoughts along. But as it passes it makes harmonies in him. He is the lyre on which the wind plays. In that way he describes how the poem arose, how all poems about nature are born. There is nothing about destruction in this verse, but there is of waking and kindling. The impetuosity and strength of the wind—it is now a spiritual power of the universe —has entirely since the last stanza quenched in Shelley's mind the thought of the wind as a Destroyer. That part of the theme is exhausted, but the thought of the wind as the Preserver, which was barely touched before, is dominant in the last; and Shelley, now at the very height of passion and in full union with the tempest, which is about to burst in rain and splendour, calls on the wind to be himself, to drive with it his dead thoughts—the wingèd seeds which are in them, as germs are in the flying leaves of the wood, thus recalling again the original image—to quicken a new life in mankind.

v

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My Spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the Universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

But as before, uncontent with a single image, he repeats the same thought in another image, still, however, clinging close to the wind, and images an unextinguished fire in his heart, each spark of which is a thought. Over this fire the rushing wind is blowing, and bears on its wings the living embers to kindle fire in the souls of men.

And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unwakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy!

The last thought has now been reached, the last realm over which the wind is sweeping. It has passed through the forests of earth, through the clouds of the sky, into the depths of ocean, through the woods and sky and ocean of Shelley's heart; and then, at the very point and climax of emotion, it leaves himself and sweeps through all mankind, bearing away with it dead things and the seeds of new. Out of the personal Shelley passes into the universal, and at that moment the future opened to him. Beyond the storm, beyond the winter it ushers in, he sees the new-awakened world, the birth of all the seeds, the outburst as of a spring in humanity;

O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

This is the lyric of lyrics. It is the hymn of our own world. It ought to be set to music by a great musician, but he should have the genius of Beethoven. 'Ineffectual Angel!' indeed; nay rather, impassionating Angel!

EPIPSYCHIDION[1]

THE charm which belongs to Shelley, and the delight which a great poem kindles in the heart of man, have made Emilia Viviani, to whom the *Epipsychidion* was written, one of the interesting women of the world. In herself she does not deserve this great interest. She was intelligent, passionate, beautiful, unhappy, capable of small literature; but of this type of women there are thousands in all classes of society of whom the world has never heard. But when Shelley idealised her, she became a personage, and all who loved Shelley made her a wonder.

Medwin described her as one might describe a Greek Muse. Mrs. Shelley wrote a long description of her to Leigh Hunt, and painted her and her character under the name of Clorinda, in her novel of *Lodore*. Claire fell in love with her. Shelley, enthralled by her solitary and sorrowful position, thinking of her as the victim of oppression and taken for a time with her beauty, mingled her up with the ideal of Beauty he had created, partly from Plato, partly from his own thought; and yet, even while he was with her, forgot the woman in the vision which she enabled him to spin out of his own

[1] An address to the Shelley Society.

imagination. When he had expressed this vision in the form of his poem, he left it behind him, and with it he left Emilia. And when he ceased to idealise her, his charm ceased to accompany her, and the rest of his circle hesitated no longer to see her in the rigid light of day. But this has not been the case with those who care for poetry. As long as *Epipsychidion* is read, Emilia Viviani will be a romantic figure. She may have become prosaic to Shelley, as she did; Mary Shelley may have mocked at her and at Shelley's Platonics, but she is still alive in the world of the imagination of man, and so much alive that we are even angry when the veil of the commonplace is thrown over her. Indeed, her tragic fate will always restore her to her poetic place. She for whom the Ionian isle had been pictured as a dwelling, and perfect love as her joy, died broken-hearted, poisoned by the deadly breath of the Maremma. And, as if she could not be kept out of the poetic atmosphere, we cannot help thinking of one, as fair, perhaps as unwise, who perished in the Sienese Maremma, though it may be of the dagger, not of the pestilence, and whom Dante has made alive for ever:

> Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
> Siena mi fe, disfecemi Maremma.

We keep her then, and we do so rightly, in the element of Shelley's poem, but if ever we wish to balance our poetic impression, and to clearly understand that the woman and the poem belong not to

the actual, but to the ideal world, we may take up Shelley's letters. Every one knows what he said afterwards of *Epipsychidion* and its subject. But the words which follow were written before he wrote the poem, and are cold and judicial.

'I see Emilia sometimes, and whether her presence is the source of pain or pleasure to me, I am equally ill-fated in both. I am deeply interested in her destiny, and the interest can in no manner influence it. She is not, however, insensible to my sympathy, and she counts it among her alleviations. As much comfort as she receives from my attachment to her, I lose. There is no reason that you should fear any mixture of that which you call *Love*. My conception of Emilia's talents augments every day. Her moral nature is fine, but not above circumstances, yet I think her tender and true, which is always something. How many are only one of these things at a time.'

That is quite enough. It has not the touch of any real passion. It was written, if Mr. Dowden's date be not a conjecture, about a month before he began *Epipsychidion*. During that month he saw Emilia continually; her affection for him increased, and his for her; and when he wrote the poem, he had left behind for a time the indifferent coldness of the words I have quoted. Much of what he said was now mixed, consciously or unconsciously, with some love for the woman herself, for one who was the mortal image of the ideal creature, the soul whom he loved as his true mate

and complement in the world of pure thought and love. In that ideal world some touch of human love for Emilia now mingles itself with his immortal love. It rises through the intellectual imagery of the poem, and setting it on fire, redeems it from the coldness of a mere philosophy of love, and makes it passionate. It was the same, I think, in the *Vita Nuova*. Dante writes of the absolute Love, and the Wisdom which is at one with Love, and he represents this under the form of Beatrice. But he also writes—borne away by a real love—of Beatrice herself alone; and then again, seems to write of both together, as if the earthly and the heavenly passion were wrought into one. In *Epipsychidion* a similar thing takes place. Shelley sometimes speaks of Emily as of a woman towards whom he feels love, and sometimes only of his *Epipsychidion*—the divine image of his soul, whom he feels through her, and who is veiled in her. The phrases change from being personal and passionate, to being impersonal and passionate. The image and the thing imaged are frequently fused into one. Emilia and the 'Soul out of his soul' are clasped together, like two hands, in the verse. But this is chiefly in the beginning of the poem. As he warms in his effort Emilia is neglected. She has done her work. He has ascended, through her, to the divine mistress of the world of his own thoughts—the spirit whom he describes in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, whom he pursues in *Alastor*, whom he had longed for all his life long, but whom he had never grasped.

Emilia is but the passing shadow of this substance. For a moment, in the rush of his song and his thought, he seems to seize the substance at the end of the poem. But the effort is too great. He falls back from that high region with a broken wing. 'Woe is me,' he cries—and he never tried to reach it again. *Epipsychidion* is the last shape into which his idealism of Love was thrown. The greatness of the failure, following on the greatness of the effort, made him put this kind of thing away for ever. When he spoke afterwards of the poem, he said—'It is a part of me which is already dead.' And all the love poems which follow *Epipsychidion* are in the real world, without a trace of philosophy, inspired only by personal affection.

I have said that there was a personal element in this poem, that Shelley had some feeling for Emilia herself. But there was another element of personality in it different from that which had to do with her. He infused a personality into the ideal Beauty to which he aspired to unite himself. Plato did not impersonate his idea of Beauty, but Shelley did this thing. He was forced by his nature to realise the idea in some form, and to realise it as belonging especially to himself. Hence he created an Epipsychidion—'a soul out of his soul'—a heightened, externalised personality of himself, conceived as perfect; an ideal image of his own being; different in sex; his complement; originally part of him, now separated from him; after whom he pursued; whom he felt in all that was calm and

sublime and lovely in knowledge, in nature, and in woman; and to absolute union with whom, such union as is described in the latter half of *Epipsychidion*, he passionately aspired.[1] And this Being, since she was the essence of all the loveliness which he could conceive or feel, represented also to him and for him—ideal Beauty. This creation was not Platonic—Plato spoke only of the Idea of Beauty. This was an invention of Shelley's, an addition, to satisfy his cry for personality, to the Platonic theory of love. He expresses it fully enough in his essay

[1] He describes this love of his in *The Zucca*:

I loved—oh, no, I mean not one of ye,
Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
As human heart to human heart may be;—
I loved, I know not what—but this low sphere,
And all that it contains, contains not thee,
Thou, whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere.
From Heaven and Earth, and all that in them are,
Veiled art thou, like a . . . star.

By Heaven and Earth, from all whose shapes thou flowest,
Neither to be contained, delayed, or hidden,
Making divine the loftiest and the lowest,
When for a moment thou art not forbidden
To live within the life which thou bestowest;
And leaving noblest things vacant and chidden.
Cold as a corpse after the spirit's flight,
Blank as the sun after the birth of night.

In winds, and trees, and streams, and all things common,
In music, and the sweet unconscious tone
Of animals, and voices which are human,
Meant to express some feeling of their own;
In the soft motions and rare smile of woman,
In flowers and leaves and in the grass fresh-shown,
Or dying in the autumn, I the most
Adore thee present or lament thee lost.

on Love; and it reaches its extreme of mingled ideality and personality in the poem of *Epipsychidion*.

The history of the development of this conception is written in his poetry. In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he conceives of the Archetypal Beauty, the beauty which is the model and source of all beautiful forms, much as Plato might have conceived of it. It is not personal at all. It is a pervading spirit, whose shadow, but never whose substance, is seen. But this conception was soon changed. He wanted personality. He embodied this archetype in a feminine being, existing in the super-phenomenal world, glimpses of whom he saw at times, and she was the other half of his own soul. 'Her voice,' he says in *Alastor*,

> was like the voice of his own soul
> Heard in the calm of Thought.

And if he could have been content with that—if he could have kept himself wholly to the ideal personality—it had been well. But he had not strength enough. He was always driven, by a weakness in his nature, to try and find her image in real women. His ideal love continually glided back into a desire of realising itself on earth; and yet, when he attempted to realise it in any woman, she fell, or earthly love itself fell, so far below the ideal image, that he was driven back again from the woman on earth to the ideal in his own soul. Thus smitten to and fro, he had no peace. He was, as he calls himself in *Adonais*, 'a power girt round with weakness'

—the creator of thoughts which afterwards pursued their creator as wolves pursue a deer.

Alastor records the coming of this vision and the agony of not being able to realise it. The poet, unable to be content with the love of abstract Beauty alone, unable to find it realised in any of its mortal images on earth; unable to live wholly in the super-sensuous world, unable to satisfy himself in the sensuous; beaten and tortured between these two inabilities, dies of the pain of the struggle.

Prince Athanase, as we discover from the commentary, would have recorded, perhaps step by step, the vicissitudes of this pursuit. A number of other poems contain allusions to this conception which, from his long brooding on it, had become one of the roots of Shelley's life and character. *Epipsychidion* was its noblest, most triumphant, most complete expression, and in that expression of it, it perished. In the poem he recapitulates the whole history of this idea in his soul. He describes, first, the being whom his spirit, in his youth, oft

> Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft
> In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,

whose voice came to him from nature, history, romance, and high philosophy, whose spirit was the harmony of truth. This is the Spirit in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Then he describes, in the lines which begin—

> Then from the caverns of my dreary youth,

the vain search for her, repeating in this passage

the motive of the story of *Alastor*. In the midst of this we come upon that phase of the pursuit which is not contained in *Alastor*, but is contained in the notes to *Prince Athanase*—the meeting with that false image of pure Beauty which awakens sensual love, a phase which is treated of by Plato :

> There—One, whose voice was venomed melody
> Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers ;
> The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
> Her touch was as electric poison,—flame
> Out of her looks into my vitals came,

And this lower love may be compared with that dwelt on in Shakespeare's later Sonnets, to which Shelley, speaking of *Epipsychidion*, refers.

Having thus recapitulated his youthful experience in the pursuit of ideal Beauty, he next turns to show how he sought in mortal women, and in love of them, to find the shadow of this soul out of his soul—some image of the celestial substance of pure Beauty. He goes through these women, one after another, and represents them under various symbols. I have elsewhere made some conjectures with regard to the actual women whom he represents under these symbols, but no certainty can be arrived at concerning them. Only one thing is plain, Mary Godwin is the Moon of the passage, and it is clear from what he says that she did not completely satisfy his heart. But she only fails to satisfy him so far as she is of the earth, and not of the ideal region. He was quite content with her as long as he chose to live in the outward world. But for the

supersensuous universe, and as a realisation of his spiritual bride, she was not enough. Then he meets Emilia; and in her, for a time, at his first contact with her, he seems to meet the actual image, the earthly form of the ideal Beauty whom he claims as the bride of his soul. In speaking of her, he mingles the ideal and the real together, the divine and the human. But as the poem goes on, the woman as a woman ceases to be palpable in his verse. There is no confusion now between the image of Emily and the thing imaged. Emily as a woman has disappeared. There is nothing left but the vision of Beauty embodied in his Epipsychidion, whom he seems at last to grasp, and whom he calls Emily. Sometimes a phrase of personal passion slips in, because of his 'error of seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal,' but from the moment he cries,

> The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me,

he speaks only of the vision of his youth, of the personality of her who is his second soul or perhaps his very soul, of the substance of whom he only possesses a shadow; of the spiritual form of the pure and ideal Beauty which, in the supersensuous world, belongs to him; of her whose pressure on him from without is the source of all his ideals, all his aspiration; whom he feels speaking to him in all knowledge, love, nature, and thought. Emilia herself is but one step in the ladder by which he has attained the vision of union with this pure, personal,

spiritual shape of Beauty. It is with her, under the name of Emily, that he flies away into the life beyond phenomena. The description of the flight is entirely symbolical. The Ionian isle and all else are meant to be impalpable; images of an immaterial world. No keel, he declares, has ever ploughed the sea-path to that island. It is cradled between Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea. No scourges that afflict the earth visit it. A soul burns in the heart of it, an atom of the Eternal. And a passionate description of his life there with Emily is not a description of earthly passion. It is the description of Shelley at last united to that other far-off half of his being, and the incorporation of the two into one is as incorporeal as the rest. It is a description of the one ideal yearning of the soul towards Beauty; of the only true love which is felt in life (which but touches earthly women on its path as means towards its end) clasping at last its ideal in the immaterial world of pure Thought, and with the emotion of that Thought. But it is so far beyond that which is possible for man to realise continuously while he is shut in by mere phenomena, that having attained it for a moment, he breaks down, and falls exhausted from the height.

> Woe is me!
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the heights of love's rare Universe,
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

The one true love of human life is then ideal, not

in the world of the senses at all, and cannot be realised or satisfied by any thing or any one on earth. Its object, ideal Beauty, contains the substance of all the varied forms of beauty which we find in thought, in emotion, in nature, and in humanity. This Beauty is the one life in a million forms which are themselves its painted shadows. Hence, when we love man, woman, or any form of nature, it is not these that primarily we love. We love the living spirit of Beauty, of which each of them is one phase alone, and we love these, that we may pass beyond them to the spirit that they partially express. They are steps in a ladder by which we reach the perfect reality.

Hence arose a theory of personal human love which traverses the code of social morals, and that theory Shelley held. It was, that to bind ourselves down to one object of love alone was not wise, because then we rendered ourselves incapable of seeing and realising those different aspects of the ideal Beauty which we could find in other minds, in other personalities. When we limit our loves, we limit our capacity, so far, of grasping a full conception of Beauty. He introduces, logically enough, this view of his into the midst of *Epipsychidion.* Whether Mary liked that theory, whether it has any rightness in it at all, how far Shelley practised it, or refrained from putting it into practice, is not the question now. He held it in theory, and he places it here. He never was attached, he says, to that great sect—

> Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion.

Feeling immediately that it will be said that to love more than one person in this relation is to destroy love, he expands his theory by stating that love is of such a quality that it is not lost by being divided. The first object of love is not less loved, but more loved, by the person who loves, when he gives love to other objects, to other persons. Love is like understanding which grows bright by gazing on many truths. Nay, if love is given to only one object, it builds for itself a grave. Again, when we divide the base things of life, suffering and dross, we may diminish them until they are consumed. But if we divide the nobler things, pleasure, and love, and thought, each part exceeds the whole, and we know not

> How much, while any yet remains unshared,
> Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared,

to man.

This is a theory capable of being wrongly used by those who have the sensual idea of love and beauty. By Shelley, who abhorred not only sensuality, but even claimed the world beyond the senses (the world of ideas) as the only real world, it could not be used in that manner. But it made him run counter to the code of morals which prevails in society on the question of marriage. The moment he ceased to love Harriet Westbrook

he considered himself as no longer married to her, and went away with a woman he did love. He never ceased to love Mary, and therefore he was always faithful to her. But he saw no reason whatever why he should not, while he was faithful to Mary, give deep affection to other women, and find represented in them other phases of the absolute Beauty, which phases he was bound to feel and gain, through them. And this he did—though society necessarily condemned his action—with a conviction of his rightness. Emilia represented, and with astonishing force to him, one of these forms of the ideal Beauty, and enabled him, through his affection for her, to get nearer to realisation of it than he had ever done before. It is therefore quite natural that the statement of this theory should be, as it were, the centre piece of the poem.

I turn now to the poetical quality of the poem and to the characteristics of Shelley's work displayed in it.

It is an exceedingly personal poem, and contains almost all Shelley's weaknesses and powers, and both these at their height, because writing, and writing passionately, about his own inward life, he was under no such restraint as a subject apart from himself would naturally furnish. Here nothing that he thought seemed irrelevant, for the subject was his own thought.

He starts on his way like the stream that leaped when Moses smote the rock. The introduction is short, but ends with a phrase which shows how

he chose, from the very beginning, to throw off all literary reticence :

> I weep vain tears, blood would less bitter be,
> Yet poured forth gladlier, could it profit thee.

And then we are afloat not on a river, but on a torrent, on whose swift and flashing surface, as we move, we have scarcely time to breathe. This marks the whole poem. It is the most rapid of all his works. There is only one pause in it : just before the torrent changes into a deeper, quieter stream, but a stream even more swift than the torrent. The pause is where he stops to describe the theory of love which he held. That is, as it were, the *portage* in the midst of the descent of the river ; the halt on the wayside before the race is taken up again, with the goal in sight.

He begins by a description of Emily, but far more a description of the image of Beauty he worshipped in the calm of his soul. The phrases change, as I said, from Emilia to the Beauty she shadows, and from that Beauty back again to her. The two are mingled as Form and Idea are mingled.

It was a constant artistic habit of his, when he had found a theme—and I use the word in its musical sense—a theme such as he finds in the lines ;

> Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
> Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
> All that is insupportable in thee
> Of light and love and immortality!

—to vary that theme as long as he could, changing

the key, and then following eagerly the new thoughts, with their correlative emotions, which were suggested by the change of key. He follows these wherever they lead him, no matter into what strange places; inspired, but with an ungirdled inspiration. He did not retain, save rarely, that steady command over his materials, that power of choice and rejection over his imaginations which the greatest artists possess. In his eager movement of improvisation he frequently puts down every thought—and the thoughts are shaped in metaphors—which occurs to him; and too often trusts to accumulation rather than to choice to produce his effect. There are fine exceptions, the best of which is the *Ode to the West Wind*, but they are exceptions. Again, he is often forced, in order to get his thought into form before him, to shape it into a multitude of metaphors, each without connection with its companions, and at the end to find that he has failed to satisfy himself. The thought is *not* shaped. The greater poet, like Homer, would have chosen one comparison and done all he wanted with one. Three times Shelley, working in this way, returns to the charge at the beginning of this poem, and three times he records his failure.

The series of metaphors which call the Seraph of Heaven who is hidden in Emilia—

> Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!
> Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe!
> Thou Moon beyond the clouds! Thou living Form
> Among the Dead! Thou Star above the Storm!

> Thou Wonder and thou Beauty and thou Terror!
> Thou Harmony of Nature's art! Thou Mirror
> In whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,
> All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on!

—ten metaphors—end in his saying that his words are dim and obscure her, as they certainly do.

The next attempt to embody his thought, in a changed key, begins with

> Sweet Lamp! my moth-like Muse has burnt its wings;

and ends, after thirteen metaphors, with another confession of failure:

> I measure
> The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
> And find—alas! mine own infirmity.

By this time, however, Shelley, who always warmed while he wrote, his own music thrilling him into quicker creation (one of the marks of him as a fine artist being that at the end of his poems he becomes a greater poet than at the beginning), had risen into a higher region, and the beat of his wing in it is stronger now and nobler than before. Again he renews his attempt to shape his thought, and he almost succeeds.

> She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,

so he begins, and the series of similes with which he indicates that glory of the Being of beauty which shines through Emilia's mortal shape—here ended by a rapid rush of metaphors, at last linked to-

gether with some unity by his spiritual passion—is a splendid series, containing two magnificent descriptions of aspects of the sky, thrown off in the quick rush of the verse for mere enrichment of his thought.

The whole passage has the quality of great music, and its fault, if I may call it a fault, is that it is done in the manner of music, and the manner of music is not the manner of poetry. Yet the higher he soars, and the more noble his flight (and this is extremely characteristic of Shelley as an artist), the more he feels that he is not master of his own passion; that he cannot grasp the fiery bird of his own thought and bid it stay its flight for definition. He cries at the end:

> Ah, woe is me!
> What have I dared? where am I lifted? how
> Shall I descend, and perish not?

And this, which I have described, applies not only to this beginning, but to the whole poem. Even after the extraordinary ease, rapidity, and sustained loveliness of the last part, after its noble and breathless climax, he feels that he has not realised his conception, is most conscious of his weakness when he is most master of his power. 'Woe is me'—he takes up the phrase again—

> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the height of love's rare Universe
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

Yes, this is one of the marks of the man, and well he knew it.

His head was bound with pansies *overblown*.[1]

It is easy to heap critical blame on Shelley for this. Any fool is capable of that, and many have had that capability. But if we could take away this weakness we should not have Shelley any longer,

[1] It may be that I have dwelt a little too much on this confession of weakness, and I certainly should not have done so if it had occurred only in this poem, which is not only personal but philosophical. But it appears again and again in poems which are wholly personal—at the end of the *Ode to the West Wind*, in the portrait he draws of himself in the *Adonais*. Want of power to keep the heights he could gain was felt by Shelley himself to be one of his characteristics.

Otherwise, I should have not made so much of it in this place; be cause this swooning, as it were, of the mind when it is brought face to face with absolute Beauty, and is therefore thrilled with the absolute Love, is common to all the mediæval poets who wrote about Love, and is described by them literally and allegorically. Even in the *Convito*, which Shelley may have had in his memory, and where Dante, in his later years, wrote distinctly of his Lady as signifying Philosophy —the most beautiful and excellent daughter of the Ruler of the Universe—we find the Poet making the same confession as Shelley made. He describes at the end of the third chapter of the third Treatise how powerless language is to express what the intellect (*intelletto*) sees.

'E dico che li miei pensieri, che sono parlar d'amore, sono di lei; che la mia anima, cioè 'l mio affetto, arde di potere ciò con la lingua narrare. E perchè dire nol posso, dico che l'anima se ne lamenta dicendo: '*Lassa, ch' io non son possente.*' E questa è l' altra ineffabilità; cioè, che la lingua non è di quello che lo 'ntelletto vede compiutamente seguace.'

This only corresponds with that failure of words, of which Shelley speaks, to express thought. But Dante's mind was too mighty to lose its power over itself. It is only at the sight of the eternal light of Deity—only after he has drawn nearer to expression of the ineffable than we can conceive possible to man, that he cries

'All' alta fantasia quì manco possa!'

but some one else, and one distinction he has among the poets would be lost. For to take away the weakness would be to take away also the powers of which the weakness was an extreme. He fell exhausted, but it was because he soared so high; he trembled like a leaf, but it was because he was of such a nature that he could feel the more delicate secrets of the Universe.

And the question to ask is not—'Why was he so weak?' but—'Is there any other poet who could soar in this skylark fashion, and into these fine ethereal regions?' and 'Is it possible to soar into them in any other way?' There are tenderer regions, no doubt, than these, wiser also, and more practical regions—more practical for comfort and teaching to men, for sweet and helpful thought, for feeling that inspires and heals—higher regions where the more majestic imaginations dwell, like the gods, in valleys of calm and joy; and into these Shelley did not soar. But his nature did not take him there. Where his nature did take him was a region into which no one else takes us, and where it is well we should sometimes travel; or, if it be said it is not well, where a good number of us wish to be taken. There is no one else but Shelley to bring us into that far dim country. This is a part of his distinctiveness and his distinction; and it is a great thing for us. And the solemn persons who do not wish to come, but stay only among the other regions of poetry, need not grudge us our charioteer, nor our course in the ether with him.

Next, I wish to draw attention to another poetic power Shelley possessed, which is well illustrated in *Epipsychidion*. It is his power of realising and describing landscapes which are wholly ideal. They do not belong to nature, nor do they imitate her. They are no more records of what has been actually seen with the eyes than are the landscapes of Burne-Jones. Like him, Shelley invented his landscape for his subject, and it is intended to be remote from reality.

When, describing how the voice of the spirit of Beauty came to him in solitudes, he speaks of the fountains and the odours of flowers, the breeze and the rain, he does what another man could do. But when he creates the country of the following lines, which is dreamland, and yet which we see and feel, he does what no other poet but Shelley has ever done. He meets the spirit of Beauty

> In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,
> Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
> Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
> Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
> Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
> Paved her light steps;—on an imagined shore,
> Under the grey beak of some promontory
> She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
> That I beheld her not.

How unlike nature—yet how clear! How ethereal, yet how vivid in his imagination! It is indefinite, yet definite enough to see. And where it is most definite—'under the grey beak of some

promontory'—it is made most ideal by the supernatural touch at the end, which transfers the whole to the region of the finest-woven thought,—'robed in such exceeding glory that I beheld her not'—a phrase which throws its ideality back on all that has preceded it, and makes the landscape even more ethereal.

Still more out of the world does his description become when he pictures himself as leaving this imagined land, and springing, 'sandalled with plumes of fire,' into pure space to find his ideal. Yet, though he is in an unseen, unimagined void, the vision that he sees is definite. He beholds himself flitting here and there, and then—

> She, whom prayers or tears then could not tame,
> Past, like a God throned on a winged planet,
> Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it,
> Into the dreary cone of our life's shade.

What impersonation! Clearness of vision midst of the visionary!

And now a new imagery comes into the poem. The whole landscape changes to fit a new mood of mind. Unity of impression is neglected for the sake of incessant altering of the mood, and with each mood the scenery alters. He has seen a momentary vision of the perfect Beauty, but has been unable to pursue it. The whole universe mocks his endeavour, and he goes into the wintry forest which represents life after youth's ideal has been dethroned. Another poet would not have

carried further the metaphor of the forest. Shelley, on the contrary, invents a whole scenery for the wood; realises it, as if it were an actual forest. It is a thorny place, through which he stumbles, and great trees fill it and grow on the grey earth. Strange plants and strange beasts are in it, and untaught foresters. It is there he meets by a well, under nightshade bowers, the image of sensual love. When he is deceived by his first hope, and stays his footsteps, he seems changed into a deer hunted by his own thoughts.[1] On the path, then, one stands like the Moon descended to Endymion, and leads him into a deep cave in the wild place, where he falls asleep; and Death and Life flit through the cave, like wingless boys, crying 'Away, he is not of our crew'; that is, not of the life nor of the death which rule the actual world. At last he is awaked from sleep—from a sleep which is a sleep in a dream, and which, in the dream, has its own dreams—by Emily coming through the wood which springs into life before her, passing from naked winter to soft summer.

The imagery then changes again, and he paints himself as a great earth, a world of love, with fruits and flowers, billows, mists, and storms and skies,

[1] He repeats the thought in the *Adonais*:

> And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
> Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

And the thought is taken from Wordsworth—

> And his own mind did like a tempest strong
> Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along.

ruled by twin spheres of light, by moon and sun, by Mary and by Emily—each embodying for him phases and powers of the Absolute Beauty. Let others also come, he cries, and add their powers, and be other shapes of Beauty whom also I may love.

We read all this vaguely, and with vague pleasure. It is too changing, too indefinite in thought to give a high intellectual pleasure, and it is too far removed into a world of fancy to awaken personal passion, or to interest us by its emotion. But the curious thing is that if we try to see the landscape or the images that move through it, both landscape and images, though they are only symbolic, are really definite. The places can be seen, described, could be painted. Shelley has looked upon them, and put down clearly what he saw. This is creation, and a kind of it which we do not meet in the work of other poets. We may call it useless, but it gives us pleasure. We also see it as Shelley saw it. But if there had been more passion in it, if the thought desired to be expressed had been more intense in Shelley's mind, the creation would have been still clearer, would not have been so mixed with foreign matter. The symbols used would not then change so often, the vision would be more at unity with itself. Our pleasure would not be so mingled, nor should we be forced to give so much study to disentangle a web of emotion and thought and memory, which, when we have disentangled it, does not quite seem as if it were worth the trouble which we take.

But now matters change. The imagination in Shelley has been warmed by the work it has done, even though that work is not of the best. He has also got rid of confusion, of side issues, of memories he thought right to introduce, of things he thought it best to conciliate. One thought alone remains now. It has emerged clear from all the rest and is their mistress. The moment Shelley grasps it and isolates it vividly, his imagination rushes into it alone; all his emotion collects around it, and the rest of the poem is as luminous as the previous part is obscure. It is with Shelley as with all artists who are worthy of the name—as emotion deepens clearness deepens.

The day is come and thou wilt fly with me

begins the close. Mary, Emily, all the rest, have passed away; and Shelley is alone, in perfect peace, with the living image of his own soul, with his being of absolute Beauty. A splendid passage about love, closely knit, the metaphors hand in hand, introduces the new theme of his flight to the island with her who is the soul out of his soul. And then we possess the creation of the island of imagination, of himself as Love, of Emily as absolute Beauty, of their life with one another in absolute joy, of their imperishable union in passion. This is the vision to which all the rest has led. It is clear, simple, astonishingly bright in the sunlight of thought, in the sunlight of feeling. It is realised to the smallest detail. The landscape is luminous, set in pellucid air, and is

wholly at unity with itself. Every touch increases the impression, and I think it is, in its own super-sensual world, the most beautiful thing—for pure beauty—which exists in that type of English poetry. It is not sublime, it is not on the highest range of poetry, it is not of that primal emotion which redeems the heart from the world, but it is of an exquisite and solitary loveliness. And it runs without a break in its beauty to a noble end, to a perfect climax—to that fine and spiritual reality of passion, which is, when it is pure of self, the last summit of human joy and peace to which we attain in life.

KEATS

JOHN KEATS, though of the same date as Shelley, is not of the same time in the world of poetry, and the resting-places of the two poets are no unfitting symbol of that truth. The grave of Shelley lies close set in a hollow of the ancient city-wall, in the Protestant graveyard at Rome. Around it the trees have grown up for many years, and the paths that divide the terraces have been established of old. But Keats lies under his own field flowers, about a bowshot from the grave of Shelley, where no ruins touch his stone as the Aurelian wall touches the ashes of Shelley. There are no ancient cypresses near, no well-worn paths, no sense of old-world quietude such as hallows with tenderness a place where the dead have lain for many years. The wild soft grass is there, but the grass is always young, and does not tell, like the cypresses that shadow Shelley, of growth and of decay, of experience and pain. It fitly enwraps the grave of a poet who has in his poetry no special note of any age, or if of any, of ours more than of his own. *Endymion*, *Hyperion*, the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, *Isabella*, have no political, religious, social elements

such as in Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, or Coleridge tell us at once when the poems were written. Shelley lived and wrote with Keats, but there is a distance between them as there is between their graves, as great a difference between the spirit of their poetry as there is between the natural scenery that encompasses their resting-places.

Moreover, all the poets of Keats's own time were influenced by the political and social aims which were forced into actuality in the French Revolution. The ideas that awoke the youthful passion of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, that stirred the wrath of Scott, that worked like yeast in Byron and brought forth new matter, that Shelley reclothed and made into a prophecy of the future—the excitement, the turmoil, the life and death struggle which gathered round the Revolution—were ignored and unrepresented by Keats. Their poetry spoke of man; of his destiny, and his wrongs, his rights, duties and hopes; it is poetry not only for the sake of the art, but also poetry for the sake of the human race. It has an end beyond the pure artist end, and that end had its ground in the primary ideas of the Revolution.

In Shelley that was for the first time partly modified. Half his poetry is divided from this excitement around the cause and interests of mankind, and written for himself alone. It is art in love with art. And the strange thing is true that in this man, in whom the spirit of the Revolution flamed highest, began the death in poetry of that fiery impulse.

There is an impassable gulf between the *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*, and the air of the one is unbreathable by the other.

But in Keats the ideas of the Revolution have disappeared. He has, in spite of a few passages and till quite the end of his career, no vital interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought, none in the future of mankind, none in liberty, equality, or fraternity, no interest in anything but beauty. And of all the religious and theological questions, of the lives of the poor, of education and class divisions, of the nature of the soul and whence it derived truth, of its relation to the natural world, of duty to our fellow-men, of whether materialism or idealism were true, of God in his relation to man, of God in nature—questions which one and all were vital to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, and afterwards to Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold, which, though not discussed as doctrines, yet water like rivers all the landscape of their work—there is, in spite of a few vague aspirations, not one solitary trace in Keats. It is not that they are consciously laid aside, it is as if they had never existed in the world. The human passion of the *Prometheus Unbound* was in his ears. It fell upon them as unheard as the war trumpets of earth are by the angels in heaven.

Once, in his first volume, he hopes in poetry to 'find the agonies, the strife of human hearts,' but the hope has no result in his work. Then, later on, it

seems to occur to him that he is living in a world of fevered thought and pain. It was so when he wrote upon the Nightingale, for a vague heartache then beset him, and he realised that the world was troubled. But then his impulse was to fly from it all—to drink of Hippocrene, and leave the world unseen, and with the nightingale fade away into the forest dim.

> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs,
> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

That was his temper, and this is the strange new position of Keats, as a poet, in relation to the impulse of the Revolution. That impulse is dead in Keats.

The reason of this remarkable change, this isolation of Keats, even from his close contemporaries Byron and Shelley, was that he unconsciously felt, as they did not, that the ideas on which the world had lived since 1789 were, in that form, exhausted. No high spiritual or political emotion of any kind came to him out of the heart of the people, for there was no such emotion in England. After Waterloo, when he began to write, the country had sunk into a mean or a sullen materialism. When

the wave of the Revolution ebbed, the ship of imagination was stranded on the shore of apathy. The middle class in England was excited enough about getting on, about wealth and comfort; the poor were excited by starvation and oppression, but the old days when all Europe was young in thought, when men lived by ideal hopes, when even the poor dreamed dreams, when faith was infinite, when Wordsworth saw the new-born world bathed in dawn—were dead and gone. And Keats turned from it all with scorn and took refuge in the ideas and the beauty of the past. It is true that Scott did likewise, while he was a poet; but he did it for a different reason and in another temper. Shelley wrote alongside of Keats, but he was out of England, and did not realise the degradation of his country creeping, like a murderous sleep, into his soul. He felt it, but he felt it as an excitement, because it awakened hatred of it in his heart. He had the power to abhor it and voice his abhorrence, because he saw it from a distance. Unlike Keats, he could still write about the interests of humanity, but they were not its present, but its future interests. When he touched on the present he touched it with wrath as of fire. He did what he could to destroy it, and he painted its overthrow and the rebirth of man, through its doom, into a new life. But had he lived in England he might have, like Keats, ignored the whole of the society in which he lived, and set aside all the past. This is what Keats did. Unable to endure the lifelessness, the ugli-

ness, the meanness of his time, he turned his back on it and sought the glory that he needed in the storied days of old Romance, in the far-off loveliness of Greece. Here is the sonnet with which he prefaces his first volume of poems. We hear how he strikes, in the very first line, the note of his sorrow.

Glory and loveliness have passed away;
For if we wander out in early morn,
No wreathed incense do we see upborne
Into the East, to meet the smiling day;
No crowd of nymphs soft-voic'd and young and gay,
In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
Roses, and pinks, and violets, to adorn
The shrine of Flora in her early May.
But there are left delights as high as these,
And I shall ever bless my destiny,
That in a time, when under pleasant trees
Pan is no longer sought, I feel a free,
A leafy luxury, seeing I could please
With these poor offerings a man like thee.

The poems that followed are steeped in his own delight in nature, in the visions of Greek life, in mediæval tales. The past is all in all, the present England has vanished away. The year after this volume he published *Endymion*—'the stretched metre of an antique song.' The induction to the poem proclaims again his revolt from the world of commonplace in which he lives, and he resolves to find beauty far away since it cannot be found near at hand.

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'erdarkened ways
Made for our searching:

there is one thing, he concludes, which remains, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever; Its loveliness increases.' There is my hope, mine, and the hope of all who live in these inhuman days. Where shall he seek and find it? and he answers, 'in the loveliness of pure Nature; in the great tragic stories of the world, acted when the world was great; in all the fair and chivalrous tales of love and fate and beauty';

> yes, in spite of all,
> Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
> From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
> Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
> For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
> With the green world they live in; and clear rills
> That for themselves a cooling covert make
> 'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
> Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
> And such, too, is the grandeur of the dooms
> We have imagined for the mighty dead;
> All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
> An endless fountain of immortal drink,
> Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

This, then, was his first pursuit—the soul of all his poetry. 'With a great poet,' he says, 'the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration.'

Indeed, the poet does not think as he writes of any other thing than the joy he is receiving from the tide of beauty which, flowing through his senses, awakens in his heart emotions so creative that they become ideas; and these ideas, mingling musically together, become one ideal; and this, his energy, now glowing all through with feeling, embodies at once in form.

Then, immediately, the poem is incarnate. Nor does he propose any end to himself except the embodiment of his pleasure. It is only afterwards, when the poem is made, that he desires that his pleasure should be vital for others, and hopes to find his own pleasure sent back to him by the sympathy of his fellow-men. But that is an afterthought. At the moment of delightful creation he has lost himself, the world, fame, the desire for sympathy, in the ravishment of beauty and its emotion. And Keats is accurately true to himself when he says: 'I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burned every morning.' Nor was it Beauty in this or that particular form that he worshipped. He loved it in the flower and in the cloud, but he loved it in each thing as a part only of the Universal Beauty, which itself, one and infinite, abode in all things—'the mighty abstract idea of Beauty,' as he calls it. With this his heart was filled, his loneliness peopled. No wonder he escaped from the meanness of the world, for this is how he described his life: 'I feel more and more every day as my imagination strengthens that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed round me, and serve my spirit the office of a King's body-guard. Then tragedy with sceptered pall comes sweeping by, and according to my state of mind, I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches or with Theocritus in the vales of Sicily.'

But there was another trouble from which he freed himself. It was the trouble which the condition of things in the world gave the poets themselves. The condition was always there, though its badness was intensified in the days of Keats. It had many forms. Wordsworth called it the heavy and the weary weight of this unintelligible world. In musing on the sorrowful problems of life Coleridge lost his early joy. Man as the sport of fate or the victim of God became the object of the bitter contempt of Byron. Shelley was tormented day and night because of evil. That was part of the woe, and Keats threw it all overboard at the beginning of his poetic life. All I need to know, he said, is Beauty. It is not all we need to know; but when we are utterly wearied, despondent and embittered, it is a good thing to lead us into the sorrowless land of beauty, and Keats, even now, brings to us that blessed healing and refreshment.

It is true that in the earlier poems there are many passages which tell us that the fate of humanity, and mortal sorrows and joys, touched the mind of Keats. He felt that he ought, as he grew into fuller prophecy, to take them as his subject and be passionately involved in them. But this was in the future. At present his life was elsewhere, in the pursuit of loveliness. Even when, as in *Endymion*, he glances at the sad fates of men, it is but a glance, and he passes on his way to range the woods with Cynthia.

Two other elements in the condition of their world

irritated the poets. One was that modern science had deprived nature of beauty by depriving it of life. The other was that worldliness of heart had robbed men of the child's unconscious love of the loveliness of the universe. And the poets, like Keats, had fled to Greece to find the divine element of life and of childhood in the world. Goethe cried out in the midst of German dulness for the classic world. But he was himself too fresh not to be above too great a regret for it. The regret in him was transient, and only gave him a strong emotion which he turned into an additional power of enjoying the present, as every morning created it afresh for his enchantment. But Schiller was not like him. In his youth regret for the vanished beauty of the Greek world, where all was life, was pre-eminent. 'Where art thou, lovely world,' he cries in the *Gods of Greece.* 'Return again,

> Schöne Welt, wo bist du? Kehre wieder,
> Holdes Blüthenalter der Natur!
> Ach, nur in dem Feenland der Lieder
> Lebt noch deine fabelhafte Spur.
> Ausgestorben trauert das Gefilde,
> Keine Gottheit zeigt sich meinem Blick.
> Ach, von jenem lebenwarmen Bilde
> Blieb der Schatten nur zurück.

Wordsworth, even Wordsworth, breaks out once, impassioned with distress, because nothing we see in nature is ours, because we are out of tune with her beauty, into his Pagan cry:

> O God, I 'd rather be
> A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

These were moments in which the poets of that time longed for the vital universe of the Greek. Keats took all these moments, and made them into that which they regretted. The other poets mourned a death in nature; but Keats thought, There is no need to mourn; Nature is not dead but alive. The living world is at our doors. What the Greek felt we may feel. And so vigorous was his ardour that when he drew close to this life he was drawn into it and clasped its joy and beauty. He did not reproduce it. *Endymion* is not Greek, nor *Lamia*, nor *Hyperion*. But he won its temper, the temper of the divine childhood of the world. He forgot the weary and the heavy weight of the unintelligible, and dwelling in the absolute beauty lived and breathed in joy.

We may trace this daily companionship with beauty through his poetry of nature. We must not say that Keats's work on natural scenery was at all like the work of the Greeks upon it. It differs, from the outside, in almost every way. But the temper of the soul with which he looked on nature had all the simplicity, and the same feelings of joy and worship wrought together, which a young Athenian might have had before Socrates came among

the youths to disturb their life by urging them to the pursuit of knowledge of themselves. Such a youth moved in a living world, and everything that lived in it was lovely and might speak to him. It was no mere ball of fire which then the young man saw when he looked on the rising of the sun from the Acropolis, but Apollo himself, burning in his car with ardour, and driving the tameless steeds. It was no dead volcanic world he saw when the moon sailed through the sky, but the goddess of the silver bow on her way to kiss Endymion. At any moment, as he walked among the olives and the oaks, he might meet Pan with his 'sweet pipings' and all the choir of fauns. From every tree under whose shade he slept at noon, from every brook where he drank at eve, the dryad or the naiad might come forth, and the immortal knit relation to the mortal.

And this very temper, half worship, half joy, and both in a thrill of hourly expectation of the birth of the wonderful; this living sensibility, this power of seeing all things with a child's amazement and forgetfulness, was the temper of Keats when he was with nature. It is not so much the temper of any other of the poets.

If sometimes, when he has mingled thought with nature, he is a little out of his unconscious world with her, even then he will not have anything to do with the persons who philosophise about her, who ask questions about her life. Then he is like, not Socrates, but the transient mood in which Socrates was when Phaedrus brought him to that

pleasant place by the Ilissus. Some one has talked to Socrates, as the sun-theory persons might talk to one of us, of the rationalising explanation of the legends of nature.

'My dear Phaedrus,' Socrates answers, 'I quite acknowledge that these explanations are very nice, but he is not to be envied who gives them. And if he is sceptical about the marvels of nature, and would fain reduce them all to the laws of probability, this sort of crude philosophy will take up all his time. I must first know myself, therefore I say farewell to all this. The common opinion is enough for me.'

And though Socrates does not care for the trees and the country, and would rather be in towns where men, his teachers, live, yet when he is brought to the reposeful spot near the Ilissus, his enjoyment of it, and his readiness to accept the popular feeling about the nymphs, would have delighted Keats. Moreover, the first sentences both of Socrates and Phaedrus are like a piece out of one of the poems of Keats.

'The little stream,' says Phaedrus, 'is delightfully clear and bright; I can fancy that there might be maidens playing near.' 'Yes, indeed,' answers Socrates, 'and a fair and shady resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. There is the lofty and spreading plane tree, and the agnus castus, high and clustering, in the fullest blossom, and the greatest fragrance; and the stream which flows beneath the plane tree is deliciously cold to the feet. Judging

from the ornaments and images this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the nymphs. Moreover, there is a sweet breeze, and the grasshoppers chirrup, and the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head. My dear Phaedrus, you have been an admirable guide.'

Keats might have said it all; it is the note of his younger poetry about nature. The description breathes enjoyment from every word, not intense enjoyment, but the frank, child-like pleasure of that everyday life which saw beauty immediately, never missed it, was its common companion and lover; and therefore, since beauty was never strange, did not lose, through intoxication with it, the use of intelligence or the powers of the soul.

It was a temper, in Keats, of unruffled pleasure, a sensitive, girl-like, sensuous pleasure in beauty, and in the consolation of beauty to the soul; a pleasure which loved also to have the body comfortable while the soul enjoyed, so that all things might be in harmony. When Socrates speaks of the grass softly sloping like a pillow for his head, of the delicious coolness of the stream to the feet—we not only listen to a Greek, we listen to Keats. It was also a temper in him which, freed from the religious and philosophical troubles of men, could play with nature. He had a way of fluttering, butterfly-fashion, from one object to another, touching for the moment the momentary charm of each thing—the work of fancy who 'is never at home.' There is a passage in one of his earliest poems where

he lingers on the bridge above the stream, and with the quick glancing eyes of a faun that waits for a nymph in lazy pleasure, notices minutely all things, or rather, lets all things flit in and out of his brain; not caring to ask any to stay and keep him company, but pleased with them and this game of life —enjoyment without thought, or thought its own enjoyment.

> Ever let the Fancy roam,
> Pleasure never is at home:
> At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,
> Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;
> Then let winged Fancy wander
> Through the thought still spread beyond her:
> Open wide the mind's cage door,
> She 'll dart forth, and cloudward soar.
> O sweet Fancy! let her loose.

That is often his temper. It is not the temper of the deeper imagination. That is grave and penetrative, and, when the game of fancy ceased to please him, its power was active in Keats, through all his intercourse with nature. It uses the work of fancy to decorate the ineffable landscape it creates—the landscape the soul sees underneath that which the eye beholds—but itself goes home to humanity in the midst of nature, and to nature in the midst of humanity. Here is a verse in the *Ode to Psyche* in which the imagination, sounding its incommunicable depths, moves like a creative spirit; in which the mind of man and the soul of the natural world are woven together; and at the last, to warm

and soften all, human passion arises to vitalise the whole.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new-grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-clustered trees
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lulled to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night
To let the warm Love in!

When he had finished with *Endymion*, when the trouble of the world had come upon him, when he had seen his brother die, and felt himself that life was ill-made for him, his note towards nature changes. It is mixed with sorrow, but it is sorrow which is impassioned to lose itself in joy, which remembers the times of self-forgetfulness, and urges him to escape. 'Leave me behind,' cries sorrow, 'escape for your life into joy.' And Keats obeys; flies to nature and her loveliness, and for a time succeeds in forgetting; then the note of pain falls in again, and again he forgets it, and again remembers, and

again forgets—till the alternating passion is worn out and all the mixed music dies.

This is the spirit which informs the *Ode to a Nightingale*. That ode is far more beautiful, because more human, than the earlier poems of nature. The beginning is full of sensibility to human pain. He would quite forget what the nightingale had never known among the leaves—

> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

—forget it on the 'viewless wings of poesy,' in the tender night, in the green depths of the woods, among

> The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
> White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
> Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves.

But his desire to escape from this, on which I have already dwelt, is not now strong enough to conquer the siege of the world's sorrow. The trouble returns, the song of the bird makes him half in love with easeful death. Had he been as gay as of old, he would not have thought it, as he does now, 'rich to die,'

> To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

But he was changed; the new sensibility to love and pain deepens the colour, strengthens the thought and passion, of his nature poetry. It has entered into the flitting delight in beauty, and makes the description of nature more close, more sensitive,

more imaginatively heard and seen than anything he has written in the earlier poems. Take the two last verses of the *Ode to a Nightingale*:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown:
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
>
> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf!
> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley-glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

How different it is! This is no butterfly work, flying from one thing to another, always tasting, never resting. Keats and the nightingale are one; it is his soul that sings in the bird, his music that passes away over the hill. Into nature has now penetrated the tragedy of man. Yet it was not for long. The passion was deep while it lasted, but it seemed to him unworthy of the manifoldness of beauty to linger in it. There was so great an infinity in the beauty of the world that to mingle up

in its pursuit the delaying pressure of the sorrow of humanity was not right for him. He was bound to leave behind him this phase, in which humanity was added to nature, for new loveliness unstained by human pain.

'I look not for happiness if it be not in the present hour. Nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow were before my window I take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hearing a misfortune having befallen another, is this,—Well, it cannot be helped, he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit.'

This life in the moment, and in the momentary joy and movement of all things in nature, was the source of his directness in description. He was wholly in the place, and in the time, and with the thing of which he wrote; not confused by thoughts of how the trees would look in winter if he saw them in spring, or how the clouds in the sky might be arranged to-morrow; still less confused by any imputation of his own feelings to nature. In earlier days he did use what Ruskin calls the pathetic fallacy, but not now. What *was*, was enough, nay more than he wanted;—and it is our want of imagination, of copiousness of heart, of clear sight and of fulness of life, that sends us into the past or into the future or into our own soul, when we are in the midst of any present beauty. I think it is due to this unconfusion of impression

that Keats's imagination has room and capacity to make those fine impersonations of nature which since Spenser have never been so well done. In truth they are finer than those of Spenser. If he had been worried as Coleridge was with considering his past; if he had been tormented like Byron with his own unpleasant present; if he had had a philosophic theory of nature like Wordsworth or Shelley to steal in and out of his imagination, he could never have realised so well the very life of autumn, the everyday wanderings and fancies of the third spirit of the year.

> Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
> Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
> Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
> Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
> And sometime like a gleaner, thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook;
> Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
> Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

'Where are the songs of Spring?' he fancies that some one asks. 'Ay, where are they?' Keats answers in half-sarcastic fashion. Why talk now of spring? we are in autumn;

> Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,

and he flies into a vivid description of the soul of the season. This joy in the present, this isolation of the beauty of the hour, this making of it a divine

possession, and losing in its loveliness the pain of life, is one of the chief marks of his genius.

'In truth the great elements we know of are no mean comforters; the open sky sits on our senses like a sapphire crown; the air is our robe of state; the earth is our throne, and the sea a mighty minstrel playing before it, able, like David's harp, to make such a one as you forget almost the tempest cares of life. I have found in the ocean music—varying (the self-same) more than the passion of Timotheus—an enjoyment not to be put into words.'

If we think that Keats ought not to have been content with this; that he ought to have added to enjoyment science, balanced beauty with a weight of knowledge; the answer is that he was, in one half of his nature, not content with it. He did desire to add knowledge to beauty, to find truth at one with loveliness, to feel with man's tragedy while he enjoyed the universe. We meet this desire again and again in his letters; and when the knowledge he sought for was the knowledge of more beauty in the great stories of mankind, in the great tragedy of the passions of men, it was right to seek for it. But to know things that were not beautiful would have done him no good. The thoughts he had that this life of his was idle were idle thoughts. It might be said of Keats—They also serve who only feel and love. There are those who are like the lilies of the field, who by being beautiful teach the world what beauty is, and they bring as much blessing and good to others as the great workers do who

face and heal the miseries of men. They, like Keats, think often they ought to be up and doing work, and sharing in the tragedy of life. But they have not that power, and if they leave their own work for the other work, they make the great mistake. They cannot help practically dreadful disease and pain and misery, and these terrible things disturb and injure the delicate nature by which they, in their own way, heal and comfort the world. They ought to cling to their own nature, and live it out for that part of the world which their nature is fit to help. If they live only in selfish seclusion of thought, without any impulse of love, they lose their power. Without love the finest nature in the world rots away. But if a tender love of being beautiful like the lilies of the field, and of manifesting beauty for the sake of the world—in order to help, delight, and console the weary, to bring the power of seeing loveliness to those who are blind—if this be at the root of their life and work, as it was with Keats, then the less they have to do with fierce and terrible misery, and the less knowledge they have of it, the better. Let them keep to the exercise of their own powers. If they do not, they will lose or weaken those powers. When Keats allowed himself to strive for knowledge of the tragedy of man, he was not strong enough for it, and his poetic power lost its full beauty. The recast of *Hyperion* is a sad example of this. When he met the misery of a futile love, and the misery of a fatal disease, his nature and his poetry broke down into failure and silence. It is the high vocation of

some to be a lily of the field. It is at their peril that they wish to be an ear of wheat.

When Keats was as yet untroubled he saw this clearly. One night he fretted after knowledge, but with the morning came better and truer thoughts. He heard the thrush singing outside his window, and the thrush told him true.

> O fret not after knowledge! I have none,
> And yet my song comes native with the warmth.
> O fret not after knowledge! I have none,
> And yet the evening listens. He who saddens
> At thought of idleness cannot be idle,
> And he 's awake who thinks himself asleep.

All the world is sorry that he could not have escaped from this cruel knowledge. Illness came, and ill-fortuned passion, and the weight of the world's distress. This bright Faun of poetry felt the pain whose only healing is immortality.

The pursuit by Keats of beauty in nature, and of the truth of it, was in accord with the poetic tendency of his time. To love nature for her own sake had now become one of the impulses, one of the special qualities of English song. And he studied nature in England, though he wrote of it in other lands and times. Through all his work—in *Endymion*, in *Hyperion*, everywhere—the scenery is English scenery. If ever any one among our poets studied nature in the open, and not in the studio, it was Keats. More directly, more concisely, with less of encumbering theories, self-

thoughts, symbolic fancies, than either Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, or Byron, he drew directly from nature herself.

To find this beauty was easy to him. He had great powers for its discovery. He had a deep tenderness, subtle sensibility, and nothing escaped his quick and observing eyes. What was seen, instantly awoke its corresponding emotion. In one moment his heart rose to welcome the new guest, and to surround it with images which multiplied like a crowd about it. But that power is not enough to make a poet. There are hundreds who possess it, and cannot use it. But what Keats saw and felt he could shape, and with swiftness and rapture. Then, he had multitudes of words at hand, all clamouring to be used, and he could select the fittest and the most magical. There are fine surprises of charming expression which meet us continually in *Endymion* when he is writing about nature, and which in spite of the faults of that poem make it a delightful companion. Nor did the power—an unchartered, dissipated power—shown in *Endymion* remain as it was then. It freed itself from its weaknesses. It grew nobly, and into splendour. There is, in his later work on nature, a great nobility of phrase, of a strange enchanting simplicity, as if nature herself had discovered the right word for him, which is the reason, I suppose, why Matthew Arnold has said that he is with Shakespeare. In that, perhaps, with Shakespeare! But in the rest?—and how much is that rest!

I give one example of this high simplicity, directness, conciseness, and strange beauty in description of nature—Shakespeare could not have bettered it, but of what use is such comparison? It is different at every point from Shakespeare's way. It is Keats, and of no other temper and style than his. Moreover, it is essentially modern. There are centuries between its method and manner and those of the natural description of Shakespeare. Lorenzo's ghost is speaking and tells of his grave.

> Saying moreover, 'Isabel, my sweet!
> Red whortle-berries droop above my head,
> And a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet;
> Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed
> Their leaves and prickly nuts; a sheep-fold bleat
> Comes from beyond the river to my bed:
> Go, shed one tear upon my heather-bloom,
> And it shall comfort me within the tomb.'

Then, starting from those last two lines, and in his later way of work, he weaves in and out with the landscape the sorrow of humanity. The quiet scene is now veiled with deep regret and lonely pain. Shakespeare did not do this. He fitted his landscape to the passions of his characters and his subject; but the landscape was not part of them; it was a background only, suitable, but distinct. But here Lorenzo's sorrow pervades the scenery.

> 'I am a shadow now, alas! alas!
> Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling
> Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,
> While little sounds of life are round me knelling.

And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,
And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,
Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me,
And thou art distant in Humanity.'

The lines have their own mystic, magic beauty of thought, of images, of sound; but how unlike Shakespeare, how essentially his own! The atmosphere which they create is not of this earth, but of the world of vision; and their voice is ghostly, high, thin, clear, not to be heard of mortal ear, unless in dreams.

Along with these qualities he had another special quality of genius; it was a swiftness, almost an unexampled swiftness, of giving form to the things that he imagined. It is told of the *Ode to a Nightingale* that it was begun and finished in two or three hours after breakfast. The dedication to the volume of *Poems* was written while his friends waited. Some of his finest work came in a moment in language as natural as 'leaves to a tree.' 'I have, for the most part,' he says, 'dashed off my lines in a hurry.' Such swiftness rarely produces good work. But when the work is good, as with Mozart whose speed was astonishing, it proves genius of a very high power. Few poets have combined swiftness and excellence. Shelley did so rarely; he corrected and re-corrected his first drafts. But Keats poured out noble poetry, in lovely form, in an hour or two. The *Ode to a Nightingale* is scarcely changed from the original draft;—and such swiftness with excellence is a wonderful thing.

it is the carelessness of one who had a thousand poems within him; whose inward waters were so full and copious that he felt no need to store up those he had created.

We may trace, also, this predominant love and pursuit of beauty through his poetic work on humanity. Keats loved to find beauty in the great romantic tales of the world, in the days and deeds of chivalry, into whose spacious realm, among enchanted forests where knights and maidens met, and satyrs of Greece and fairies of a later world abode together, Spenser led him when he was young. But he did not imitate Spenser; he did not mingle together the Greek and the mediæval world. He had been 'in love before, and it was with the beautiful mythology of Greece.' Therefore we had first *Endymion*, with a love story of a goddess and a shepherd in woods and caves and mountain meadows. And, as if that were not enough, he led us in the poem through the depths of the sea, to pity all the lovers who had died in its cold waters, and to rejoice at their resurrection. Then we were taken into the darker side of human life in Greece, the weird and later legend of *Lamia*; where the ancient serpent superstition which came from the Aryan home is linked to the love of woman, to the decay of sensuous joy, to the misery of fate. The reason of the world is against the isolation sensuous passion creates; and its beauty challenges doom. When science concentrates this reason of

the world, without pity, on such beauty, it withers away. Those are the thoughts of it, and in it Keats went deep into the heart of men when they are young.

Then came *Hyperion*, a more solemn poem, as if the awe of his own fate brooded over him, the tragedy of a great ruin, the sorrow of gods dispossessed. Byron was not very wrong when he said it was like Æschylus. Like Æschylus in a way—in a certain antique grandeur of conception, but in all the thinking and feeling, in all the scenery, and in the overladen verse, as unlike Æschylus as possible. All through it, also, more soft and sweeter beauty, more of beauty for its own sake, a greater cry for it, a greater passionateness of expression than ever belonged to any of the ancients, to whom depth of humanity was more than any loveliness, to whom the long-winding music of Keats would have seemed intemperate.

Mingled with these Greek stories were other stories, nearer at hand, where he pursued beauty into the tales of romance, of romantic sorrow in Isabella, of romantic joy in St. Agnes Eve, both warm throughout, one with the love which dies of love, the other with the love which lives for love.

And all these stories were to him alive with the beauty of great humanity. But while he pursued this beauty in far-off, lovely stories of human passion, it came into his mind, that as he should not have neglected knowledge when he was dreaming of loveliness in nature, so he ought not to neglect, when

following beauty in human lives, to speak directly of the moral and spiritual life which was at the top of things, nor fail in that sympathy with all humanity which had belonged to the imperial poets, and which, were he to become great, should also belong to him. Many phrases which speak of this thought occur in his letters. I am not all I ought to be, he seems to say, I am but one of the lower poets, for I am not moved enough with the pains and joys of all men. My love of beauty makes me want sympathy. I am less than the great ones of the earth, because I have not communion enough with men. Unlike Shelley, then, who, as he lived longer, wished to recede from men, Keats looked forward to doing work which should bring him closer to men. It is the mark of his greatness of character that he saw so clearly what his poetry needed to make him the lofty poet.

> Forgetting the great end
> Of Poesy, that it should be a friend
> To soothe the cares and lift the thought of men.

There is a passage in the second version of *Hyperion* which puts clearly this position of his soul. He enters, in his dream, into a vast sanctuary, and sees a veiled goddess enthroned at the top of a lofty flight of steps, and hears a voice which says:

> If thou canst not ascend
> These steps, die on the marble where thou art.

The goddess is she who in the first *Hyperion* has been Mnemosyne, who teaches Apollo how to sing

the fates of men which she remembers. She is then Memory and Poesy combined ; and to reach her feet and receive her inspiration is to become a poet. But here she is called Moneta, and the name suggests one who warns and teaches the poet to be at one with all the passions of men, with their strife for the highest, with their daily life. Keats pictures himself as scarcely worthy or able to approach her, because he has not enough of humanity in his work. He almost dies before he mounts the steps. But because he has not only lived for beauty and for himself with her, but has also, even in this self-isolation, desired greatly to leave himself behind and to sing the fates of men, to love the spirit of beauty in human sorrow and joy—he, though a dreamer, does not die upon the floor of the temple, but looks into Moneta's eyes that he may receive her power. Here are the lines in which he sketches himself :

'Holy Power,'
Cried I, approaching near the horned shrine,
'What am I that should so be saved from death?
What am I that another death come not
To choke my utterance, sacrilegious, here?'
Then said the veilèd shadow : 'Thou hast felt
What 'tis to die and live again before
Thy fated hour ; that thou hast power to do so
Is thine own safety ; thou hast dated on
Thy doom.' 'High Prophetess,' said I, 'purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.'
'None can usurp this height,' returned that shade,
'But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

All else who find a haven in the world,
Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
If by a chance into this fame they come,
Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half.'
'Are there not thousands in the world,' said I,
Encouraged by the sooth voice of the shade,
'Who love their fellows even to the death,
Who feel the giant agony of the world
And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
Other men here, but I am here alone.'
'Those whom thou spakest of are no visionaries,'
Rejoin'd that voice, 'they are no dreamers weak;
They seek no wonder but the human face
No music but a happy-noted voice:
They come not here, they have no thought to come;
And thou art here, for thou art less than they.
What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
A fever of thyself: think of the earth;
What bliss, even in hope, is there for thee?
What haven? every creature hath its home,
Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
Whether his labours be sublime or low—
The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct:
Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.
Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
Such things as thou art are admitted oft
Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
And suffer'd in these temples: for that cause
Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees.'

This was his image of himself as a poet when he had finished *Hyperion*, and, in passionate desire to reach that higher level of song, where humanity is the theme, he cries—

> Shade of Memory!
> Let me behold, according as thou saidst,
> What in thy brain so ferments to and fro.

What ferments there is the whole history of the past of man—that mighty tale which Keats desired to write, but had not yet the power. It is to begin with the history of the fall of the Titans, and the advent to power of the gods of Greece—the conquest of a lesser beauty by a higher—and Keats now begins, after this new preamble, the recast of what he had already done in *Hyperion*. The recast broke off suddenly; he had not the heart to go on with it. But in the original poem we are carried on to the meeting of Apollo with Mnemosyne, of the god of poetry with the goddess who holds in her memory the whole history of mankind, and holds it in a sympathy as vast as her knowledge of it.

Keats, in the words of Apollo, there describes the passion for knowledge of all human history which has seized on him, and of which he desires to sing; but chiefly for knowledge of what men have done and suffered, created and destroyed, aspired to and failed in. He is torn and rent by the passion of it. The goddess, merciless to his pain that he may reach creative joy, fills his aching and fearless ignorance with her memories—and what Apollo cries is what Keats desired to feel:

> Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
> Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
> Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
> Creations and destroyings, all at once

> Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
> And deify me, as if some blithe wine
> Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
> And so become immortal.

He would be impassioned with humanity. Nevertheless he recognised that this was not yet his path; that he must wait for greater strength. He had seen a higher ideal, and, with that grave modesty that belonged to him, resolved to pursue it, but not yet. It was an envious fate that forbade the world that pleasure and that use. Yet I doubt he would have had the power to reach the heights he saw. There was not enough iron in his nature. It may have been well that he died so soon.

With all this new aspiration he had not let go his clear conception that beauty, such as he conceived it —the abstract idea of beauty in all things—was the summit and crown of all a poet's aim. But he now identified beauty with truth, and out of them, when together and at one, proceeded power. All things must bow to the highest beauty. When it was seen, truth was seen and power came. That was his last thought; that the law of the whole universe. And splendidly he expressed it in *Hyperion.*

Saturn the dethroned goes to visit his brother Titans in the vast cave where they lie, fallen and desolate, after their overthrow by the younger gods, and he asks their counsel. They rise one after another to speak, and all their speech is of wonder and anger at their ruin. At last Oceanus, in whose face Saturn, astonished, sees severe content, takes a

different view, and his thought is the finest motive in *Hyperion*. In it Keats also declares his inmost thought. Oceanus tells the Titans that they must be content to fall; and that, when they have seen the reason of their overthrow, they will arrive at the rigid truth, and in grasping truth be satisfied, as he is satisfied. They have fallen by course of nature's law, not by their conquerors:

> Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain;
> O folly! for to bear all naked truths,
> And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
> That is the top of sovereignty.

And this is the law—that as Heaven and Earth overthrew Chaos and Darkness because they were fairer than Chaos and Darkness, and we, the Titans, overthrew Heaven and Earth because we were more beautiful than they,

> So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
> A power more strong in beauty, born of us
> And fated to excel us.

Our dispossessors tower above us in loveliness, therefore they

> must reign
> In right thereof; for 'tis the eternal law
> That first in beauty should be first in might.

Then he breaks out, impassioned, eager to prove his point:

> Have ye beheld the young God of the Seas,
> My dispossessor? Have ye seen his face?
> Have ye beheld his chariot, foam'd along
> By noble winged creatures he hath made

I saw him on the calmed waters scud,
With such a glow of beauty in his eyes,
That it enforc'd me to bid sad farewell
To all my empire: farewell sad I took,
And hither came, to see how dolorous fate
Had wrought upon ye; and how I might best
Give consolation in this woe extreme.
Receive the truth, and let it be your balm.

Impossible to resist that loveliness! It forced him to give way; he accepted the truth of things.

Still finer, on the same thought, is the wild, sad speech of Clymene. She does not argue, like Oceanus, with the philosophy of fatalism, but she feels the same truth. The beauty which is beyond her power to create, breaks her heart with pain, and breaks it again with joy. She hears Apollo play, and as she hears, she knows, since the music is lovelier than aught the Titans can make, that all hope of empire is gone from them for ever.

Standing on a pleasant shore, Clymene took a shell, and breathed into it the music of their woes, when suddenly

from a bowery strand
Just opposite, an island of the sea,
There came enchantment with the shifting wind,
That did both drown and keep alive my ears.
I threw my shell away upon the sand,
And a wave fill'd it, as my sense was fill'd
With that new blissful golden melody.

Joy filled her with its beauty, then grief conquered joy, for in its beauty she felt the doom of all she loved, and then a voice came,

sweeter than all tune,
And still it cried, 'Apollo! young Apollo!
The morning-bright Apollo! young Apollo!'

and she fled away, knowing that loveliness had overcome their world.

In the last book the same thought occurs again. We find Mnemosyne in Delos, watching over the youth of Apollo. She has left the Titans, ravished with his beauty, to add all her ancient power to his tuneful youth.

Show thy heart's secret to an ancient Power
Who hath forsaken old and sacred thrones
For prophecies of thee, and for the sake
Of loveliness new-born.

Beauty, then, and power are linked together. Where there is the highest beauty there is of necessity the greatest power. It is the instinct of all spirits to bow unquestioning to beauty, if they have the heart to see it. This is Keats's second law. The first is that truth and beauty are one. Yet the two laws are one law. For beauty is the form that truth takes—its eternal Logos; and when all the world, feeling its supremacy, acknowledges and worships perfect beauty, it acknowledges and worships the divine essence out of which beauty rises into form—the essence of absolute truth. That was the last thought of Keats upon this matter—truth, beauty, power—a co-equal trinity.

Of the earlier poems of 1817 there is not much

to say. They proclaim the influence of Spenser, Chapman, Milton, Fletcher, Browne, Chatterton, and far too much of Leigh Hunt—a good and faithful friend—upon him. They prove him to have been alive at every point to impressions on all the senses, and these impressions are expressed with a minute and rejoicing skill, and frequently with an exquisiteness which, though it continually ran into sentimentalism, prophesied in lovely and concinnate lines the future and almost unique excellence of his poetic wording. Even before he finished these poems, there are not only many lines, but even whole poems, like the noble sonnet to Chapman's Homer, which tell us that he was not only escaping from a false and fantastic sentimentalism, from a vulgar treatment of love and of womanhood, from an over-lusciousness of epithet and versing, into a stronger, truer, more critical, more tender, more thoughtful art, but also that his view of what ought to be done by poetry, and felt by the poet, what he ought to love, aim at, and delight in, had entirely changed. He desired knowledge with which to weight poetry, and sympathy with humanity with which to make it tender with love, rich with the giving of pleasure—

> a friend
> To soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of men.

All his thoughts on this matter are detailed in *Sleep and Poetry*, the last of the poems of this first volume. He realised that this lofty aim should be his, but he was as yet unable to fulfil it. Beauty alone had as yet

an exclusive power over him, and *Endymion*, with all its ideal aim, does not fulfil or embody his aspiration.

It has been analysed and represented as an allegory. I do not think the poem was written with that intention, but what he thought and felt as he wrote may perhaps be fairly wrought by others into an allegory. 'Before I began I had no inward feeling,' Keats says, 'of being able to finish; as I proceeded my steps were all uncertain.' And the whole of the poem is a confirmation of this statement. It bears the same relation to a well-constructed poem that a gipsy's wanderings bear to an ordered voyage with a single aim. The gipsy wearies at last and rests, and so does Keats. The last book of the poem is quite inferior, with a few exceptions, to the others. The faults of bad taste, carelessness, and indifference are more glaring than in the previous books, and the conception of the subject and its treatment are not only troubled, but wrong in art. It is plain that Keats was weary of this work of his. Yet in the very midst of it, is that song of the Indian maid, describing the conquest of the East by Bacchus and his crew, enriched with glowing colour, reminiscent of Titian's picture, full of the energy of genius, and enraptured, as it were, with its own melodies. There is no weariness in it, as in the rest of the book. Out of that weariness proceeded the Preface of the poem. It is a model of quiet, even of stately, self-judgment; conscious of power, but of power which had not been sufficiently educated; conscious too that in writing *Endymion* he had learnt his faults,

and was now capable of better work. No criticism of the poem can be truer than that which he made himself in this Preface, with a steadfast good sense as rare as it is interesting.

Yet, in spite of all such criticism, it seems almost incredible that there were persons who had no ears for the melody of the poem, and no apprehension of the pure gold of poetry lavished through it with a reckless, unrestrained profusion. It is full of noble passages, like the brief, solemn appearance of Cybele, like the dell where Endymion and Peona speak, like the great ocean cavern, places and images which Keats saw more clearly than he saw an earthly landscape, and, seeing, had the power to paint them. It is full of lovely, isolated lines, far, far above in power and beauty those in which they are embedded; prophetic of the Odes; strong or sweet, soft as grass, sonorous as thunder, which, as they fall on the ear, seem to live and breathe with the life of that they celebrate. A few have passed into common quotation, but there are many hidden away like violets in their leaves—and there are too many leaves. The *Hymn to Pan*, in the first book, ought to have been enough to tell the critics that an original poet had arisen in England. It may be a little too long, but he would be a bold man who should wish any of it away. Even where it is weak it is marked by that imaginative excellence of impersonation of the powers of nature in which Keats excelled. It prophesies the greatness and beauty of the Odes he was to write hereafter.

When he published again it was with *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*, in 1820. *Lamia* and *Hyperion* (*Hyperion* closes the volume) return to Greek subjects; *Isabella* and *St. Agnes's Eve* belong to mediæval story.

When we pass from *Endymion* to *Lamia* we pass from an ill-constructed, over-fantastic poem to a poem in which the construction is excellent and the divagations of the fancy strictly limited. Keats had become a conscious artist, comprehending and obeying the laws of his art. It was, of course, natural that he should grow into this, but he was much helped thereto by his study of Dryden, whose *Fables* are excellent models of the construction and conduct of the narrative poem. Every now and then we hear in the verse the 'loud resounding pace' of the steeds whose necks were 'clothed in thunder.'

The story is Greek enough, and belongs to that strange underworld of nature where Greek superstition, among the ignorant, feared, and luxuriated —a world of strange metamorphoses or ghastly terrors whose indwellers enslaved or maddened the minds of men. The woman who became a serpent and who could become a woman again, who enthralled with love the mortal she loved, and built around him a world of illusion, was one of these. This fatal witch, her piteous passion and its miserable close, seized on the imagination of Keats. He added to it pity and love; pity for the serpent-woman because she loved, as well as for her lover to whom her love brought death. He added to her

also a strange psychical power. While she lay couched in her forest brake, she had power to send forth her spirit from herself where she willed, over all the worlds of gods and men, and to bring back to her lonely dwelling all she saw and felt in her wanderings. This Keats invented for her, and it lifts her above the commonplace of superstition into spiritual power, and dignifies the poem. It is also interesting to see what the story becomes when passed through the modern imagination of Keats and through his childlike ignorance of classic life and the classic temper. It is extraordinarily naïf, and in this naïveté it is perhaps nearer to Greek reality than a scholar would have made it, whose knowledge would have troubled and complicated his execution. The story remains quite simple in the verse of Keats.

Only twice or thrice does a modern note intrude and jar, and all the more because the note has that strange vulgarity which sometimes jumps up like a demon in Keats's poetry. It seems incredible that he should have written these passages, much more that he should not have erased them. There are also here and there romantic borrowings, that is, borrowings not from real romance, but from his own shaping of romance, so that we seem to hear an echo from *Isabella* or from *St. Agnes's Eve*. But for the most part it is quite Greek enough to place us in Corinth among the unphilosophic people, who lived in wealthy houses and indulged their senses with beauty and knew not our moralities. Its charming

opening, with the tale of Hermes and the invisible nymph, shows how rapidly Keats had grown in power of noble versing, and in restraint of fancy, and in omission of the needless, since he wrote *Endymion*; and the excellence is steady from the beginning to the end. So much has been written, and so well, on its melodious, lovely, and surprising phrasing, that it is unnecessary to dwell upon this, but I do not know if enough attention has been drawn to Keats's curious love of colour, which, subtle and inquisitive in *Endymion*, is almost rapturous in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and, in jets, in *Lamia*. It is not, however, so much the colour of the landscape or the sky on which he dwells, as the colour of jewels and tapestries, and illuminated books and dress, and fruits, and rich dark woods in panelled rooms. He has the same pleasure in these things as Morris and Rossetti had, and the same power of describing them. It is almost with exultation that he describes in *Lamia* the colours of the serpent and those of the hall decorated for the marriage. Every one knows the colour-music of the scene in Madeline's chamber. In *Endymion* the colour-painting shares in the confused extravagance of the rest of the poem. It is flung here and there without order or clearness, with no sense of 'values.' In *Hyperion* it is in harmony with the subject; and in the *Odes* and *Sonnets* it is lovely.

Isabella, or The Pot of Basil is taken from a story in the *Decameron*. It is strange to contrast its oversugared sentiment with the frank and masculine

way in which Boccaccio tells the tale. The contrast favours the Italian, but in the difference lies this advantage—that the version of Keats is made thereby original. He has reconceived the characters, brought into the story a new temper of the mind, invented a new scenery, and wrapt it round and round with a subtle, separate, scented atmosphere which enters into every line of the poem, and isolates into its special air the imagination of every reader. The rhythm of the verse, the arrangement of words, the language used, the style, which is subtly different from that of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, are all charged heavily with the same peculiar sentiment. This settles the poem into an artistic unity. There are flaws, however, in this unity. The description of the brothers as men of dreadful greed, as manufacturers who drove their labourers all over the world to death, is quite unmediæval and places us in modern England and America. The talk of Lorenzo and Isabella is sometimes quite below the just level of poetry, and there is one terrible stanza. But these are slight stains, and though they jar, they jar chiefly because the rest is so curiously beautiful in feeling and in expression.

The poem is passionate enough, but the passion is felt by two weak characters, and shares in their feebleness. It has great pathos but no strength, wild emotion but not deep emotion. The two lovers were too weak in character to reach the depths of passion. But this is rather an excellence than a fault in the artist. He had conceived them

as weak. Had their passion been profound, it would not have fitted their characters. Keats has kept them carefully within the limits of their nature; but within those limits their passion—with a few startling exceptions where the language becomes too 'precious'—is of a curious, lonely, perfumed, and forlorn loveliness which is brought up to the edge of cloying, but does not pass over it. And this is done with exquisite and unconscious skill, and is supported and strengthened by an equally exquisite choice and use of words, as happy as they are surprising. This power over noble, fitting, and surprising words belongs to all his great poems, and it is nowhere better than in *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

That poem is of a finer quality than *Isabella*. In *Isabella*, Keats has written from one part of his nature alone, from the part which tended to sentimentalism in love and preciosity in expression—abundance of which is to be found in *Endymion*. In *Endymion* the work is broken, unequal, overstrained, but always poetical. In *Isabella*, all that belonged to this part of his nature, all the elements that found imperfect expression in *Endymion*, are expressed almost to perfection. It is a triumph in this kind of verse, but the kind does not belong to the nobler forms of poetry.

In *The Eve of St. Agnes* he still writes from this side of his nature, but he writes also from the stronger, healthier, and more joyous side. And the mingling of the two, each confirming and balancing the other, each entering like two spirits into his

imagination, and working in it like Eros and Bacchus—pure love and emancipating rapture—hand in hand, has produced a poem, in which there is no jarring note, of a singular loveliness, and in one of those untrodden regions of the art, wherein so many poets would fain enter, but have not the power. The story has the immense merit of improbability. We are in such a world as we find in the French romances—set free, while we read, from the whole of the modern world, and greatly blest thereby. The scenery, the climate, the imaginative atmosphere, were all created in the soul of Keats as his subject seized it, and they entered into the verse, into its every cadence, and never left it from end to end. The poem is like a crystal sphere in which changing imageries arise and pass away, incessantly shifting ; and it is surrounded by an *aura* of its own that isolates it in poetry. Indeed, this is a characteristic of all the best poems of Keats, and is more true of him than of other poets of his time, except perhaps of Wordsworth when he is dwelling, as he writes, in the innermost simplicity of his art.

In *The Eve of St. Agnes* the curious beauty of the words, their natural selection, the survival of the fittest, their out-of-the-world note, their sweet, changeful, and elfin music, are in the closest harmony with the romantic tale and its wild scenery, with Porphyro riding across the moor with his heart on fire, with Madeline, like Keats himself, 'asleep in lap of legends old.' The scenery is not described but suggested, and follows the reader throughout

the poem. The bitter frost, the rising storm, the bright moonlight seen at intervals through the driving clouds of flaw-blown sleet, the wild wind through which the lovers ride away over the black moor, are heard, in happy contrast, outside the warm chamber of Madeline, the quiet nest of tender, pure, youthful passion; and the silence and ardour of it are set over against the rude stones of the castle, the dying age of the beadsman and the nurse, against the riotous feast and the shouting of the hall. Every one has dwelt on the unpremeditated excellence of the contrasts of the poem.

I suppose we may call it mediæval. But it is mediævalism seen through the magical mist of the imagination of Keats, and in the mist the nature of Keats is playing like a child in a garden. There is then a little air of modern feeling blowing hither and thither through the mediævalism. Being so little, it does not injure the main impression, but adds a touch of remote charm to it, a scent as from a far-off land which comes and goes momentarily.

Above all these excellent things in beauty and colour and force is the loving of the lovers, and the scenery of its passion. It is the beating heart of the poem. It needs no words to praise its ardour, purity, and tenderness. And it is set in beauty. It was daring of Keats to encompass it with such elaborate scenery. The rich description of the casement and its devices, of the moonlight pouring through the dim room, of the 'delicates' aglow with colour on cloths of woven crimson, gold, and jet, of

perfumes, and tapestries, and music of the lute, might, in other hands, have taken the reader too far away from the lovers and their love, from the quintessence of the subject. But it does not; it enhances its beauty, it frames perfectly its tenderness.

It is a great pity that Keats did not finish the other mediæval poem he projected, of which we have only about a hundred lines—*The Eve of St. Mark*. In its rhythm, feeling, and manner it is so like William Morris's work that it would seem as if he had heard its melodies and seen its pictures in his heart. The description of the mediæval city, of Bertha's room and its furniture and books, of the minster seen from her window, are as warm with the firelight and the scent of ancient rooms, as the city streets, and arched porches, and the pious folk travelling to the minster service, are chill in the April evening. And Bertha, within her panelled chamber, in which we breathe the dim air of a quiet mediæval home, is a still, dreamy, shadow-haunted burgher-maiden, worthy of her room, of her missal, and of the minster square. Like all the finer poems of Keats, its atmosphere is of an isolated and solitary beauty.

La Belle Dame sans merci, which is not quite a ballad, but which Keats, when he invented it, called a 'ditty' and derived from Provence, recalls the motive of the Tannhäuser story, and belongs to his imaginative mediævalism. It is a beautiful, fantastic thing, but it has been praised beyond its worth. The skill with which each verse is closed by a line

of four strong syllables accents each step of the tragic mystery. The poem suggests passion, but is not passionate. Its magic strangeness is curiously increased by lines which have no connection with those that precede them—

> O what can ail thee, Knight at arms,
> So haggard and so woe-begone?
> The Squirrel's granary is full,
> And the harvest's done.

It is pure poetry, but not to be classed with poems like the *Ode to a Nightingale*. It is, however, of a unique originality, and instinct with an imagining power which—both in the landscape, in the presentation of the faery woman into whom the Venus of the Venus Berg has descended, and in its wild mingling of the preternatural with the natural, every detail of which is cumulative—awakens wonder and pleasure in that region of the soul which wanders from reality.

The best examples of the Odes need neither praise nor blame. They are above criticism, pure gold of poetry—virgin gold. Of them it may be said—with all reverence yet with justice, for these high things of poetry come forth from the spiritual depths of man—The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth —so is every poem that is born of the spirit.

As to *Hyperion*, with which Keats's last volume closed, it is nobly conceived and wonderfully supported. It is hard to write about the Titans titanic-

ally, yet Keats has done it. The great figures of Saturn, Oceanus, Hyperion, in stately ruin, remain great and stately to the end. The images of the younger gods, of Neptune and Apollo, with victory, radiant joy, and beauty pouring forth from them on all things like morning light, are in splendid contrast to the giant sorrows of Saturn and his comrades. I would give much to possess from Keats the meeting of Apollo and Hyperion on the palace platform before the gates. There would have been no battle. Hyperion would have yielded, like Mnemosyne, to loveliness, youth, and music—to incarnate Poetry. But, if Keats were to write the rest in the same temper as he wrote the recast of *Hyperion*, I am glad he did not finish it. I have dwelt on this recast already. It is interesting as a revelation of his aims as a poet, but it is a pity that he took to self-analysis. Had it persisted it would have spoiled his poetry. One of his greatest excellences was that he lost himself in the objects he loved and in the subjects which seized on his imagination; and self-analysis wears away the power of losing self in joy. That excellence would have departed or been injured. Nor has self-analysis any beauty in it, and Keats, the lover of beauty, would have lost in contact with himself the quintessence of his poetry. As to his aims as a poet, also revealed in this recast, they were more than he was capable of fulfilling. They were an ideal which he early conceived. They appear in *Sleep and Poetry*, they are perhaps symbolised in *Endymion*, but he had the great good fortune,

in a time of health and natural vigour, to get rid of them, and to write *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Hyperion* without being troubled by them. It was well for Keats to nourish the ideal he imaged to himself; but it is also well to understand how far one has capacity to realise it, how much of it our personal powers enable us to embody, and, if one is an artist, whether any embodiment of it in our special art will not jar or interfere with that which is most excellent in that art. Keats did not consider this, or if he did, he was led away from its consideration. He should have realised his limits and been content with them. He never could have become one of the imperial poets to whom humanity was open to its depths. He felt that all along. It was only at the close that he reproached himself for not trying to do what he was unable by nature to do. Had he not loved foolishly and morbidly, had he been well in body, he would never have written the beginning of the Fall of Hyperion, and made the unhappy change of Mnemosyne into Moneta. But ill-love and ill-health drove him inside of himself; and therein, for all of us, there is neither peace nor joy nor beauty.

But of the earlier *Hyperion* these things cannot be said. It is written within his limits, and without any serious purpose outside of the subject. Its seriousness and purpose is in the subject, not dragged into it from any ideal in some remote chamber of the soul of Keats. It sees with the clearest vision, and records in the clearest words

the characters and the figures he conceives, and the landscape in which they rest, and does not, as in *Endymion*, deviate into side issues which worry the impression of the whole. The care, the curious choice of felicitous phrase, the rejection of all that is needless, the concentration of images, the steady level of the verse, and its elaborate but easy melodies, show how very great in two or three years only was the advance of Keats in his chosen art. They represent not only its unceasing practice, but its industrious, constant, and purposeful thought.

Even more noble than these artist-powers, are the spiritual powers of the poem—invention which almost never fails, imagination which creates and shapes and burns like an unconsuming fire in the landscape, in the characters, in their action, in their speech; which seems to grasp the very life which resides in words, and forces them to speak and move. And through the whole, one thing is pre-eminent, one thing subdues the too much and exalts the too little, pervades, ennobles, penetrates, and bears the whole into immortality—the love of Beauty, which is the love of Love.

And then he passed away to find pure loveliness, but the path by which he went was strewn with pain. No end was more piteous than his, or more distressful. Very sorrowful and bitter was his pain of heart. As bitter was the slow suffering of his body. Yet he was brave and patient at the close, and always in love with things which were fair and simple, of good report, gentle, of virtue, and worthy

of praise. As he drew near to death his mind grew in quietness and peace. The tempest of his passionate love ceased to blow within him.

Two friends alone, but they, as tender as Cordelia, lived for him and tended him to the last; but it is beyond all noble compassion to think that the lover of beauty died in his youth, while as yet his revelation to us was but begun. Yet loveliness was in his heart. 'I feel the flowers growing over me,' he murmured once, when very near to death, and the saying is full of the woodland spirit that breathes through all his verse. Nor need we mourn too much. He is at home with the King in his beauty, in that land which is not so very far off as the prophet thought it then.

On his grave the words he chose himself are carved, 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' The water flows in all our hearts; and in the meadows within, where we walk when we are alone, there are a thousand flowers, born and nourished by his sweet and songful streams.

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